

2015

# Paradoxical Agency: The Ethics of Women's Rhetoric in Shakespeare's Rome

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PARADOXICAL AGENCY: THE ETHICS OF WOMEN'S RHETORIC IN  
SHAKESPEARE'S ROME

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

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May 2015

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the time and effort of many people, first and foremost my committee: Dr. Michelle Zerba, my committee chair; Dr. Anna Nardo; and Dr. Chris Barrett. They have provided me with both academic and emotional support throughout a long and difficult writing process, and I have grown under their guidance. I would also like to thank the efforts of previous committee members, Dr. Robert Hamm and Dr. James Catano.

Throughout the years, I have also found strength and encouragement in my fellow students, especially Dr. Doris Frye, Dr. Mitch Frye, and Dr. David Riche. They taught me to love coffee and to pursue teaching and writing with equal fervor. Thanks also go to Katherine Dankert and my mother Cynthia Durand, who each provided invaluable help in proofing and editing.

More than anything, I thank the family and friends who have encouraged me along the way, especially my husband, Michael. Without him, I would not have completed this project. He was my assurance and my tough love when I needed it. He accepted the sacrifice of our time and many opportunities with grace, and I look forward to making up for that lost time as this project draws to a close.

To all of you, thank you.

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## ABSTRACT

In this project, I address the problems of ethics and agency for women's speech in Shakespeare's Roman plays—*Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Coriolanus*—and the narrative poem *The Rape of Lucrece*. Regardless of their rhetorical skill, virtue, or agency, it seems that the Roman women in these works are doomed to fail: either their lives become unlivable or they lose the people most important to them. This prompts the project's initiating question: why do Shakespeare's Roman women speak if their words have no long-term effect? For these characters, rhetorical success in Shakespeare's Rome is dependent upon a particular combination of rhetorical techniques, but these tactics result in questionable agency and ethics within Rome's patriarchal system.

This project addresses whether or not female speech can be both ethical and persuasive by first investigating the roots of ethical speech in Shakespeare's Rome. Ethical speech arises out of complex social mores that define virtue and propriety for women, but traditionally ethical speech cannot create lasting persuasion. Women who challenge the limits of tradition persuade effectively; however, they do so with tragic consequences. Only Cleopatra, the one woman who speaks outside of Roman influence, successfully defies norms in order to achieve rhetorical success and rewrite her own tragedy.

Although men and women in Shakespeare's Rome face similarly contradictory demands on their rhetoric and civic duty, Roman culture makes exceedingly unfair demands on women's limited agency: as a result, there is no successful, ethical female

rhetoric within this imperfect world, not so long as women attempt to maintain the very society that restrains their agency.

## INTRODUCTION

Near the end of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, Volumnia stands before her son, a war hero who now threatens to destroy the city of Rome. The safety of the city and its citizens relies solely on her ability to dissuade her son from his current course of action, but, before she can even begin, Coriolanus proclaims that she cannot sway him or change his mind. Faced with such a stubborn refusal, Volumnia must try nonetheless:

You have said you will not grant us any thing;  
For we have nothing else to ask, but that  
Which you deny already: yet we will ask;  
That, if you fail in our request, the blame  
May hang upon your hardness: therefore hear us. (5.3.87-91)<sup>1</sup>

Volumnia acts as a supplicant—albeit an extremely aggressive one—whose voice is her only tool to protect home, honor, and family. The actual power to save or destroy lies in her son's hands, and she is clear in acknowledging his power as well as the consequences of its use. This moment exemplifies the separation between women and direct action in Shakespeare's Rome. Because of social norms relegating women to the private sphere, these characters cannot take direct action themselves, but must rely on rhetoric to motivate male listeners into doing so. Unfortunately, those same social norms de-value female speech, repeatedly putting Shakespeare's female Roman characters into an ethical double bind: social norms demand that these women protect their families and country, but they also make truly persuasive speech unethical. This raises an important question: can female speech in Shakespeare's Rome be both effective and ethical?

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<sup>1</sup> All Shakespeare references are from *The Norton Shakespeare*. Vol. I & II. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt, et al. New York: Norton, 2008. Print.

By seeking an answer to this question in Shakespeare's Roman works, we can gain a deeper understanding of female characters' struggles with the divided obligations of public and private life, particularly in protecting their husbands and sons. In addition, we can come to appreciate how Shakespeare illuminates the consequences of blind obedience to a restrictive, honor-bound, patriarchal society that forces conflicts between public and private obligations.<sup>2</sup> The women's speeches in *The Rape of Lucrece*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus* exemplify these restrictions, as well as the available means of functioning within and resisting them.

What these plays and *The Rape of Lucrece* reveal is that traditional modes of rhetoric are insufficient within the limitations placed upon female speech, and therefore female speakers must adopt alternative modes of persuasion that trouble traditional conceptions of ethical speech. Largely excluded from public and political life and generally considered intellectually and socially inferior, women in Shakespeare's Rome must rely on innovation in deliberative and epideictic rhetoric as well as creative uses of *ethos* (character or authority) and *pathos* (emotion) to overcome the limited agency allowed by cultural and familial order. Paradoxically, however, the use of these techniques leads to questions about whether they are suitable. Given these conflicts, this project seeks to answer three primary questions. First, what makes a female speaker persuasive in Shakespeare's Rome? Second, under what conditions is female speech ethical? Third, how do the ethics of female speech help us reach new understandings of the plays and Shakespeare's female characters?

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<sup>2</sup> See Miola 116 and Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare* 18, 78-80.



Shakespeare's Roman works offer particularly intriguing opportunities to explore such questions of rhetorical ethics. His Rome pulls together Stoic and Christian virtues in a way that reflects the extremes of public and private demands on individuals. Indeed, many scholars have found the Roman plays provide particular insight into sixteenth-century social concerns and constructions of gender and identity. When M.W. MacCallum separates the Roman plays from the other tragedies and histories in *Shakespeare's Roman Plays and Their Background*, he identifies Shakespeare's unique confluence of Roman-ness and Englishness as something not only absent in the non-Roman plays, but also absent in the Roman works of other contemporary playwrights (84-5). Indeed, the Roman works are not purely Roman histories, but dramatic works influenced by England's cultural inheritance of Roman ideas. Elizabeth Agnew Cochran synthesizes the work of A. A. Long and Brad Inwood, stating that "Stoicism was an important philosophical influence . . . that often combined elements of Stoic thought with ideas from Plato, Aristotle, and Christian doctrine" (Cochran 722). Furthermore, the elements of Stoicism most often absorbed into Christian culture were those relating to "duty and manliness" (Long qtd. in Cochran 723). David N. Beauregard confirms the prevalence of Stoicism—and Cicero in particular—in Shakespeare's education (37, 42), emphasizing "significant Stoic ethical shading" in his work (42).

The Stoicism of Renaissance England—the "duty and manliness" so sought after—is also the primary source of conflict for the men in Shakespeare's Rome and thus an integral factor in considering the effectiveness and ethics of female speech within the Roman works. In the other histories and tragedies, the conflict between religion and desire or obligation perhaps comes closest to the conflicts caused by *romanitas*, which

emphasizes the virtues of honor along with civil and martial service; despite superficial similarities, however, Roman virtue and Christian religion function in vastly different ways. As Coppélia Kahn demonstrates, Shakespeare's Roman plays seem determined to make the Roman ethics of public obligation more compatible with the Christian virtues:

Shakespeare is too responsive to his Roman source materials to make politics merely a clash of egos. Yet neither is he so "Roman" as to naturalize the priority of public over private. As Gary Miles remarks, "It is ... precisely the public dimension of his Roman's lives that is most problematic for Shakespeare," because he also pursues such "a distinctive interest in the interior life of his characters" (1989:279). It is the coexistence of these two dimensions of existence and the dilemma of their interrelationship, not the priority of one over the other, that drives and animates the action in *Julius Caesar*. Shakespeare dramatizes the separation of the inner subjective realm from the distinctively public world of *romanitas* in such a way that it is readable as ideologically produced in that world by the ethos of the republic. Even as this private subject is being constituted in and by a social field, it is also being gendered masculine, through the association of the public realm with Roman "firmness" and the private realm with "the melting spirits of women." (*Roman Shakespeare* 79)

Thus, even though the Roman plays and *The Rape of Lucrece* attempt to balance Roman and English sensibilities, the ancient values out of which they arise are in some respects fundamentally different. *Romanitas* begins as a public force, but it is so internalized that each character's interior life is inextricably linked to public obligation. This does not mean that the Roman plays are wholly incompatible with Shakespeare's other plays: shame, honor, and manliness, for example, are key points in Lady Macbeth's manipulation of her husband, but those arguments work for her because they are not functioning in a system based in public service and civic duty of *romanitas*. Even in *The Rape of Lucrece*, which comes closest to bridging the gap between the Roman and

Renaissance virtues, Stoicism and *romanitas* are the prevailing forces. No other plays or poems in Shakespeare's corpus deal so explicitly with the specific problems these philosophies create: the ethics of rhetoric in the Roman plays originates from a divergent value system.

Moreover, these works treat Ciceronian and Stoic values as integral: *romanitas* is closely bound up with anxieties about ethical speech, especially the dangers of persuasion, the unsettling powers of female sexuality in a patriarchal culture, and Machiavellian uses of power.<sup>3</sup> These issues create conflicts of interest that no character—male or female—can overcome without great cost. Shakespeare's dramatic and poetic representations of Rome, then, allow for the consideration not only of what it means to be Roman, but what it means to be a female who speaks in a Roman world. The other tragedies and histories often follow the conflict between personal interests and societal or moral demands, but they lack the emphasis on Roman ideals of unwavering constancy and honor. The comedies, for their part, often negate many of the cultural restrictions on their female characters as part of the generic tradition (Bamber 28-31).

In the Roman plays and *The Rape of Lucrece*, there is at least one scene in which a woman's ability to persuade a single, (usually) male auditor has massive consequences for herself, her auditor, and her country. Oftentimes, these works also include a secondary, less skillful female orator as a rhetorical foil. The more effective speakers demonstrate a greater ability to manipulate *ethos* and employ shame persuasively, but they do so by potentially crossing into unethical speech. Tamora and Cleopatra act as

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<sup>3</sup> See Colish 90-91.

Others—both culturally and ethically—who demonstrate alternatives in rhetorical technique and ethics, all in reaction to Roman values.

While the comparable rhetorical activity of women in these works invites reading *The Rape of Lucrece* alongside the plays, *Cymbeline* constitutes a different case. Because *The Rape of Lucrece* is a narrative poem, on the surface it would seem more reasonable to omit it and include *Cymbeline*—often categorized as one of Shakespeare’s “Roman” plays—in its place, but *The Rape of Lucrece* is crucial to the project because of the varying forms of rhetoric Lucrece uses throughout the poem. The range of her rhetorical performances makes her a perfect subject for comparison or contrast with the female characters in the plays. *The Rape of Lucrece* is, therefore, a necessary component of the discussion. Even the issue of genre, however, is less of a problem than we often consider it to be. On the one hand, the poem itself takes a decidedly dramatic turn once Lucrece begins to speak and act. Her dramatic, ecphrastic speech on the painting of Troy recalls Cicero’s admonition to feel the emotions one speaks in order to be both ethical and authentic, to avoid the accusation of merely “acting” the part and to allay the fears or temptations of rhetoric’s misuse (*On Oratory and Orators* 2.45). In addition, her suicide scene relies on symbolic re-enactment of her rape, making real or visible what her audience had only heard. On the other hand, the early modern period also saw little considerable difference between dramatic and poetic tragedies, particularly in regard to historical accounts. *The Mirror for Magistrates*, a book recounting the falls of various kings and queens in verse form, combined verse, history, and tragedy in a way that likely influenced Shakespeare’s construction of the history plays. In its multiple publications,

the book reflects a conflation of tragedy and history that blends seamlessly with the highly adaptive nature of Renaissance playwriting (Budra 52).

As for *Cymbeline*, although it is often categorized as one of the Roman plays, it is rarely treated alongside them, for multiple reasons. First, although Rome plays a role in the play's plot, that role is a marginal one at best. Like the rest of Shakespeare's plays, *romanitas* and Rome have little to no impact in this young England. Second, as a comedy (according to the First Folio's classification) or a dramatic romance (in more modern taxonomies), *Cymbeline* diminishes the consequences for rejecting feminine norms. Third, the play's female characters lack persuasive speeches. Even after Imogen dons male garb and passes for a young man, she never takes on rhetorical agency. Overall, *Cymbeline* is a drama of England's origins rather than tragic conflicts of Roman virtue, and it reveals more about men's concerns over female virtue than women's active, rhetorical manipulation of their own virtue and others' to achieve certain ends.

As the foregoing discussion suggests, my research for this project draws primarily on three major branches of Shakespeare criticism: studies focusing on rhetoric, Rome, and representations of gender. In criticism, these branches often overlap, but there are few longer works that focus on a combination of the three, though all are necessary for exploring the ethics of women's rhetoric in Shakespeare's Rome. The connections between these branches of study are significant for this project. The rhetoric that pervades the Roman works, including the rhetoric of Shakespeare's female characters, reveals the influence not only of Cicero, but of Aristotle. Regardless of gender, the language is informed by the three Aristotelian genres of deliberative, judicial, and epideictic oratory, which had been assimilated into the Roman tradition long before Shakespeare

(Beauregard 37, 42). This tradition, adapted and refined through the Middle Ages, formed the basis for rhetorical instruction in the Renaissance (Altman 112, 119), and the Roman works bear witness to its richness.<sup>4</sup> For modern critics, as Brian Vickers argues, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* "remains the most penetrating analysis of speech in its full individual and social dimension" (26). Scott Crider agrees, observing that Aristotle clarifies "ethical categories sometimes not articulated fully or clearly enough in Shakespearean criticism" (5). For my purposes, Aristotle's straightforward discussion of rhetorical technique and ethics is well suited to investigating the ethics of an early modern female rhetoric.

The women in Shakespeare's Rome also make surprising use of what Aristotle calls proofs, particularly *ethos* and *pathos*, for the purpose of emulation and shaming, respectively. Shaming proves a crucial part of the rhetorical success of women in Shakespeare's Rome. Aristotle provides examples of the possible approaches to each proof, including shame under *pathos*.<sup>5</sup> According to him, "... shame is imagination ... about a loss of reputation ..." (*On Rhetoric* 1384a). In other words, shame is based on the perception of others' opinions, real or imagined (1384b). This connection between shame and social visibility is the norm in classical literature, and the prevalence of the word "shame" in the Roman works indicates a continuation of that ideological focus. For

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<sup>4</sup> For more on Altman's justification and use of Aristotle, see also 13-14 and 55.

<sup>5</sup> Today, shame is often conflated with guilt, but the primary differentiation between the two is that shame requires recognition of social expectations: it hinges on the public acknowledgment and visibility—whether perceived or actual—of the subject's faults. Guilt, by contrast, comes from an internal sense of failure or wrong-doing that does not require visibility. Neither shame nor guilt is necessarily exclusive of the other; however, scholars have difficulty agreeing upon solid definitions for either. In *Shame: Interpersonal Behavior, Psychopathology, and Culture*, Paul Gilbert various definitions of shame and related emotions and behaviors. He acknowledges that there is no ultimate consensus on the subject, largely because no definition fully articulates shame without problematically over-limiting or -generalizing it (29-30).

example, in the Roman plays where “guilt” is used, it is still outnumbered by uses of “shame”; even *The Rape of Lucrece*, which references “guilt” some twenty-one times, often employs guilt in a legal, accusatory sense rather than an emotional one. For the sake of this project, then, I shall use an Aristotelian definition of shame as the negative, emotional response to an awareness that one “suffer[s] or [has] suffered or [is] going to suffer such things as contribute to dishonor and censures” (1384a).

Along with Crider’s work cited above, Joel Altman’s *The Improbability of Othello* has made significant contributions to early modern rhetorical ethics. Altman proposes a “rhetorical anthropology” that traces the origins of certain rhetorical styles and ethics from ancient Greece to early modern England (55). He applies these rhetorical approaches to Iago and Othello in order to present an ethics of improbability (28), which he uses to explain Iago’s rhetorical powers and Othello’s troubling vulnerability to it. This ethics, however, creates a “paradox” wherein culturally appropriate action “persistently exposes the dubious credentials of the discursive system it represents” (11-12). I follow Altman’s example in examining a similar paradox created by the conflicts of *romanitas* and rhetorical ethics in the Roman plays and *The Rape of Lucrece*. Crider’s work complements Altman’s: his concern with agency in the ethics of persuasion is particularly valuable, as is his discussion of female rhetors. Most importantly, he defines a universal ethics within Shakespeare’s plays. Crider’s ethics requires “a rhetor whose means and end are good, and whose audience is moved appropriately,” and, although this definition seems simple, he acknowledges that successful, ethical rhetoric also relies on the “audience’s own ethical responsibility” (6). In Shakespeare’s Rome, unethical audiences often necessitate that female speakers undertake unethical means in order to

serve the greater good; this dilemma leaves us with a complex question that Crider attempts to answer for Isabella in *Measure for Measure*: within a patriarchal society that enables irresponsible audiences, what are a woman's ethical rhetorical options, and are these options sufficient for achieving good ends? Finding an answer to this question requires a better understanding of the society informing those ethics.

Throughout the work of Altman and Crider, the deep impact on Shakespeare of Cicero's *On Obligations* is apparent. This treatise defines the expectations for a Roman citizen and clarifies the conflicts of interest that one faces between social and domestic concerns, between what is honorable (*honestum*) and what is useful (*utile*). As a discussion of what one should or should not do in service to family and the state, *On Obligations* also provides a solid foundation for the ethical issues facing Shakespeare's Roman speakers. The treatise, according to Baldwin, "was the pinnacle of moral philosophy" in the early modern period (590), and its influence is apparent in Shakespeare's frequent returns to Christian interpretations of Cicero's "stoic" virtues (Beauregard 42). Marcia Colish outlines Cicero's emphasis on the useful over the honorable and Machiavelli's extreme extension of the useful in *The Prince*. Shakespeare's Rome seems torn between extremes favoring the *honestum*, on the one hand, and Machiavellian uses of the *utile*, on the other. This conflict, I argue, is a key component in determining the ethics of female rhetoric. The Renaissance obsession with *On Obligations* formed the foundation of "Roman-ness" as described in the critical works of Coppelia Kahn, Robert Miola, and many others.

Among the secondary sources on Rome and Roman-ness, scholars of Shakespeare's Rome have spent considerable time tracing Shakespeare's source material,



his portrayal of Roman culture and values, and the artistry of his language. Critical attention has fallen most consistently on the more canonical *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, but the other plays and *The Rape of Lucrece* have all received notable scholarly treatment, especially in the last four decades. Roman Shakespeare's popularity blossomed in the 80s and 90s with the works of Miola and Kahn, among many others, who were attempting to fill the critical gaps in the depiction of Rome and Roman-ness in the plays. Miola's book *Shakespeare's Rome* discusses the plays' thematic use of Roman culture and values. In doing so, he illuminates the influence of Roman culture on Shakespeare's treatment of common themes: family, city, self, duty, and male identity. Michael Platt's *Rome and Romans according to Shakespeare* and Warren Chernaik's *The Myth of Rome in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, along with numerous articles and several collections of critical essays, provide considerable further resources for understanding Shakespeare's Rome.

Kahn's scholarship shares much of these other critics' fixation on Roman culture and masculinity, but her work is indispensable to this project given her exploration of gender in Shakespeare's Rome and women's roles in the creation, embodiment, and conflicts of *romanitas*. *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* discusses the defeminization of women in *Coriolanus* and *Macbeth*, and in it, Kahn describes female characters' ability "to mold men" as the limit of their agency (151). Her 1997 work, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women*, is one of the best-known works on Shakespeare and gender theory. This book focuses on men and women's social and symbolic roles in honor-bound, patriarchal Rome, as informed by the gendered implications of wounds and wounding. Kahn's scholarship provides not only insight into

Shakespeare's construction of Rome and Roman characters, but also terminology with which to discuss them—and their rhetoric—further. *Virtus*, or “Roman virtue,” goes in hand with *romanitas*, but it is accessible to women only through ethically troubled avenues (14-15). Kahn also examines emulation as the “agonistic rivalry” created by “act[ing] out a mixture of admiration, imitation, and domination” (15). My work will build on these terms and the ethical issues defined by Kahn's use of gender theory to explore how limitations on female agency inform the ethics behind women's use of gendered rhetorical performance.

Unfortunately, none of the works on Shakespeare's Rome or the transmission of Roman virtues to early modern England focus much on the expected behaviors or citizenship of women. The Greek historian Plutarch provides examples of exemplary Greek and Roman women in *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, and, indeed, several of Volumnia's speeches in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* are blatantly plagiarized from Thomas North's translation. The changes Shakespeare makes reveal much in the way of his characterization and intentions. This, however, is not enough for a full understanding of female virtue as it appears in the plays and *The Rape of Lucrece*. Shakespeare's Roman women are constructed from both classical and early modern sources, and thus sources on early modern women supplement the specific studies of Rome and Roman culture. Although the Roman plays lack the theological focus guiding much of female behavior during the Renaissance, the virtues were similar and clearly evident in Shakespeare's Rome. Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* is considered the model for ideal Renaissance behavior, and it is particularly useful in its discussion of male and female advising, which is, at heart, deliberative rhetoric. In addition, N. H.

Keeble's *The Cultural Identity of Seventeenth-century Woman*, Retha M. Warnicke's *Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation*, and Brown and McBride's *Women's Roles in the Renaissance* provide useful critical histories of the virtues and acceptable forms of female agency during the early modern period.

While Kahn's work is my primary source for discussing gender in Shakespeare's *Rome*, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* adds depth to our understanding of male and female behavior and gendered norms. Butler's ideas of gender as performance, as well as the societal emphasis on regulation and order within these performances, illuminate how rhetoric, agency, and ethics play out in Shakespeare's *Rome*, both for male and female characters. Many of the women's ethically problematic performances are troublesome because they attempt to create a new type of feminine rhetorical performance through emulation of traditionally masculine performances.

My project relies especially on Butler's claim that gender is the result of a "stylized repetition of acts" (*Gender Trouble*, 179); this claim may be productively linked with a major current in Renaissance rhetorical studies, one which explores the intersection of rhetorical performance and self. Rhetorical performance is by no means a new avenue of discussion, but the relationship between rhetoric and self in early modern philosophy has had a recent revival, along with a more general reinvestment in Shakespeare's connection to classical rhetoric. In 1976 and 1980, respectively, Richard Lanham and Stephen Greenblatt both concluded that the Renaissance individual was less an internally determined being and more a social construct, although their definitions varied. According to Lanham, the rhetorically trained man—*homo rhetoricus*—was one

for whom almost everything was relative: anything could be argued, and what mattered was speaking both ethically and well (3). For Greenblatt, the self was less rhetorically determined and fashioned more directly through cultural norms and social roles (256).<sup>6</sup> Although Altman's work is rooted in that of classical philosophers, his ethics of improbability also builds upon Lanham and Butler in an almost Levinasian fashion, articulating a "self" in which both the *homo rhetoricus* and his essentialist opposite, *homo philosophicus*, exist simultaneously: one created in the moment and one perpetuated by habitual action (82). Because women's rhetorical ethics is so deeply rooted in gendered, rhetorical performance, it will be necessary to discuss what constitutes a "feminine" performance. As I will argue, gender and social obligations conflict with desire, necessity, and the demands of rhetorical performance; this conflict-becomes the contested space of rhetorical ethics in Shakespeare's Rome. In a way, the ethics of female rhetoric is an ethics of self-creation.

Both men and women in Shakespeare's Rome must navigate conflicts between personal desires and public demand. Because female agency is limited to rhetorical performance, the ethics of that performance is central to our understanding of the character herself. In *Titus Andronicus*, *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, and *The Rape of Lucrece*, Shakespeare presents us with several women attempting to make themselves heard either within or against a society that has devalued and sequestered their agency. As Volumnia states in the lines quoted above, "...we have nothing else to ask, but that / Which you deny already: yet we will ask" (Shakespeare, *Coriolanus* 5.3.88-89). Each Roman woman's ability to surmount or manipulate those

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<sup>6</sup> For further theories on the Renaissance self, see also Dollimore 179.

limitations is crucial to her rhetorical success, but her rhetoric remains embedded in the discourse of Roman patriarchy. What these works show, then, is that a restrictive, unequal gender system inhibits female speakers' ability to argue ethically for and act upon "the good"—the course of action in the audience's best interest (Aristotle, *On Rhetoric* 1362a-1363b)—while reducing the audience's ability or proclivity to act upon her words. Private, decorous speech is the only non-transgressive agency these women have, but it rarely achieves complete or honest fulfillment of her desired ends, because it fails to evoke the ethical responsibility of the audience to act on good advice. Given these circumstances, female rhetors who reach beyond the typical venues of decorous speech enter an ethical gray area that subtly affects the entirety of the play. Ultimately, ethical female speech requires women to break the traditional performance of the female gender and transform it into something that transcends typical gender and social norms. The keys to this transformation are *ethos*—particularly in terms of emulation—and shame.

In chapter one, I interrogate the matter of what makes a persuasive female speaker in Shakespeare's *Rome*. This chapter, "Shame, Emulation, and the Virtuous Female *Ethos* of Shakespeare's *Rome*," sets up the cultural and technical foundations for ethical female rhetoric in Shakespeare's *Rome*. The chapter establishes the performances that construct female gender and their expected ethical limitations. In a society where women are perceived as less logical and overly emotional, social prejudices against and expectations of women place *ethos*, rather than *logos* or *pathos*, at the center of successful female persuasion; thus, the performance of a virtuous character in line with the gendered stereotype is a basic component of traditionally ethical female rhetoric and a woman's source of respectable authority. Considering this fact, the chapter will analyze

the rhetorical tactics associated with this limited female stereotype and then explore the basic ethical complications involved when women bend or transgress those limitations with emulation and shame.

Chapters two and three investigate under what conditions female rhetoric is ethical. In chapter two, “The Elusive Audience and Failed Appeals,” I examine why Shakespeare’s less persuasive female speakers fail to move their audiences despite maintaining ethical rhetoric. This inquiry responds to both the assumptions of classical rhetoric and Crider’s “universal ethics,” and I propose three primary reasons for this failure. First, these women make limited use of *ethos*, emulation, and shaming, relying instead on a stereotypically feminine rhetoric of *pathos*, such as fear, love, affection, or grief. Second, they frequently misread their audience’s investment in dissuasive or persuasive consequences, which thereby fails the basic goal of deliberative rhetoric and prevents effective shaming. Last, their weak delivery undermines their authority—their *ethos*—as speakers and advisors. Many of these failures are founded in an adherence to gendered limitations, and for that reason, an ethics of rhetoric that relies on traditional, gendered performance is problematic precisely because it *cannot* achieve good ends, no matter what its intentions. In addition, several of the women in this chapter face problems of audience and *ethos* that negate female speakers’ most advantageous rhetorical techniques. Here, the concept of the audience’s ethical responsibility plays an important role, both in determining ethics and in asserting that fault and failure do not lie wholly in the hands of the speaker. The rhetorical failures in this chapter ultimately demonstrate the importance of shaming, rhetorical performance, and emulation within varying contexts,

which leads us to consider more deeply the ethical implications of transgressing stereotypical limitations.

Chapter three, “Voluble Women: Deliberative Emulation and the Agency of Epideictic Shaming,” explores the possibilities for ethical rhetoric beyond traditional, gendered modes of persuasion. Guided by Crider’s and Altman’s analyses, I demonstrate how Shakespeare’s female speakers successfully intertwine rhetorical performance, emulation, and shaming to persuade specific audiences. These women’s choices, especially in using emulation and shaming, are not only the crux of their persuasiveness, but also the testing ground for alternatives to traditionally ethical action and speech. Analyzing the speeches of Lucrece, Portia, and Volumnia reveals both the effectiveness and the ethical problems in these non-normative tactics. The rhetoric in this chapter also hints at the potential for female speech to transcend cultural limitations by assimilating traditionally male virtues or actions into the feminine sphere: this creates a new kind of feminine authority that exceeds her male auditors’. Although persuasive, this incomplete rhetorical transcendence of gender norms contradicts many of the ethical stipulations for the ideal woman, and the consequences still trouble scholars and audiences today.

Chapter four, “Ethics of Rhetorical Performances for the Non-Roman Woman,” helps to clarify lingering doubts about ethical female persuasion and addresses how an ethics of female rhetoric reveals new understandings of female characters in Shakespeare’s Rome. By comparing and contrasting the speech of Shakespeare’s Roman and non-Roman women, this chapter explores how the contradictions of female authority and virtue function in terms of ethics. Tamora and Cleopatra are examples of female authority without a guiding ethic of civic good or a virtuous *ethos*, the two contextual

elements that, once understood, mitigate the troubled reactions to the stronger Roman female speakers. In this way, both non-Roman women provide points of comparison for the authority of political power versus the authority of the virtuous female that Lucrece, Portia, and Volumnia create with varying levels of success. Tamora, for one, demonstrates ethical speech as a non-Roman but becomes an unethical speaker under Roman guise. Cleopatra, however, ignores traditional modes of speech-making and rhetoric, providing an example of unethical persuasion based more on theatrics, delivery, and shame, without the trappings of expansive deliberative rhetoric. Her persuasion lies almost exclusively in the performance of unrestrained vice and feminine authority; however, Cleopatra's suicide is an atypical rhetorical performance that arguably establishes an ethics of female rhetoric separate from the patriarchal lens that colors the speeches of every other woman in the Roman works. Tamora and Cleopatra demonstrate the extremes of unethical rhetoric, as well as other possibilities for gendered performance; in doing so, they reveal the rhetorical and ethical sacrifices the Roman system demands of the women working to uphold it.

The conclusion, "The Limits of Roman Ethics for Female Speakers," defines the stipulations for ethical female rhetoric in Shakespeare's Rome and the implications they hold for other plays in Shakespeare's body of work. The elements and ethics of female rhetoric in the Roman works offer considerable insight into the purpose of female speech and the restrictions on female agency in each play, but they also provide us with another way of looking at characters who have been sources of scholarly controversy for decades.



## CHAPTER 1: SHAME, EMULATION, AND THE VIRTUOUS FEMALE ETHOS OF SHAKESPEARE'S ROME

The attempt to speak ethically entangles Shakespeare's Roman women in a paradox. The persuasiveness of female characters originates in the performance of culturally-determined behaviors, but successful rhetoric demands more than just a virtuous adherence to societal norms: cultural prejudices and behavioral limitations shackle the rhetorical potential of women. Effective rhetoric—specifically with male audiences—requires a unique reconstruction of the virtuous female *ethos* through emulation and shame. Unfortunately, the behaviors associated with these complex emotions form an uncomfortable bond with the stereotype of the virtuous woman. On the one hand, the two are incompatible, apparently breaking away from culturally “good means” of rhetorical ethics. On the other hand, the rhetoric of Shakespeare's Roman women is almost always directed at the *utile*—that which is “useful” to the greater public good: in order to support ethically the good of the city—and often, in turn, the good of her auditor and her family—a woman must use unethical, or at least ethically questionable, means.

Because of the numerous cultural limitations on female agency, speech is a woman's primary avenue for action, but, ironically, the very virtues that restrict the actions of Shakespeare's Roman women form the foundation for their persuasiveness and the ethics of their rhetoric. Chastity, silence, domesticity, and other feminine qualities preclude outspokenness, yet the reputation for such qualities provides the basis for an authoritative female *ethos*. Unfortunately, the decorous and virtuous performance of tearful, affectionate persuasion has little influence on the stoic men of the plays, while more assertive, masculine performances backfire on female speakers. This unforgiving

situation requires that Shakespeare's effective female speakers find a mean between a traditionally feminine performance and masculine oratory by manipulating a virtue-based, gendered *ethos* that will grant them the ability to persuade—and, if necessary, shame—with both authority and credibility.

The persuasive potential of *ethos* for Shakespeare's women derives its power from two separate sources: first, its ability to create a form of credibility that functions in spite of the social prejudices against women and, second, its capacity to make women the voices of virtue and social order. The authority to speak and persuade requires the social agency to speak in the first place, something that was problematic for a "good" woman of the Renaissance and, in turn, the women of Shakespeare's Rome. Legally, a woman's social role—the source of her identity—was determined by the men in her life. According to English law, a woman ceased to exist as a citizen once married and was subject to her husband in the same way that she was subject to her father (Brown and McBride 54-55). Socially, however, the ideal relationship was one of near equality, with both parties responsible for the well-being and management of their home (Richardson 19). Therefore, despite legal elision, women were neither wholly powerless nor wholly submissive, but they still lacked men's publically acceptable freedoms and influence. Age and widowhood loosened some of these restrictions, but not without cost. According to Antonella Piazza, old women in ancient Rome and the Renaissance had greater "economic autonomy," and their aging bodies distanced them from female stereotypes; however, they became politically invisible with the loss of their fertility (128-9). For women of any age, then, overt political action was not an option within their civil rights or societal mores. Even the women who held political power as rulers and regents during

the period never fully overcame the expectations of social norms, and neither were they immune to prejudices against the female sex (Brown and McBride 133).

The forms of agency at a woman's disposal were subtle and usually indirect, whether the woman was English or Roman. Still, women's means were not without power: "...[T]hrough letters or the spreading of rumors, they shaped networks of opinion; through patronage, they helped or hindered men's political careers; through giving advice and founding institutions, they shaped policy..." (Wiesner qtd. in Brown and McBride 125). An upper-class woman with control over her own money could make a man's political, artistic, or academic career, and she could choose to act as patron for a man who supported the political goals she did. She could also use her own intellect and rhetorical skill in transmitting ideas of her own, whether through gossip circles or private counsel. Foundations were the most noticeable form of agency, because they involved public structures or institutions openly funded by the women supporting them. The agency in all of these methods, however, ultimately relied on men taking the desired action or approving and enacting the plans. Women could fund or defund, praise or censure, but, except in exigent situations of war or absence of male royal descendants, they lacked direct influence on public policy and lawmaking. The same limitations were present in the Roman stories Shakespeare read: good Roman women were victims or advisors and rarely leaders or active agents. These cultural restrictions appear in Shakespeare's *Rome* as well, and they correlate to the rhetorical genres and proofs that Shakespeare's women employ—or attempt to employ—in the quest for effective, ethical speech.

Roman women in the plays and *The Rape of Lucrece* serve primarily as private counselors and advisors, just as their real-world counterparts did. As expected, their

primary rhetorical genre is the deliberative, advising for or against a certain course of action; however, the most powerful speeches invoke the epideictic mode (praising or blaming) with a male auditor as its subject. According to Aristotle, deliberative speech advises through “exhortation” or “dissuasion” of decisions on future events, the “end” of the deliberative being “the advantageous [*sympheron*] and the harmful (for someone urging something advises it as the better course and one dissuading dissuades on the ground that it is worse), and he includes other factors as incidental: whether it is just or unjust, or honorable or disgraceful” (*Rhetoric* 1358b). These incidental factors correspond well with the epideictic genre, because the end of epideictic rhetoric is to assert “the honorable [*kalon*] and the shameful” (1358b), with a particular focus on character and action “in accordance with deliberate purpose” (1367b). This emphasis on purposeful action corresponds to the deliberative goals of persuading to or dissuading from a particular course of action.

Given this connection between the genres, there is no question that epideictic rhetoric can serve deliberative ends or that either genre can freely flow into the other. Scott Crider, in reference to Cassius's conversation with Brutus in 1.2 of *Julius Caesar*, reminds us that the genres “are not exclusive” and describes Cassius as using “epideictic rhetoric to deliberative purpose” (48). Indeed, Aristotle himself made note of this interrelatedness: “Praise and deliberations are part of a common species [*eidōs*] in that what one might propose in deliberation becomes encomia when the form of expression is changed” (1368a). Thus, the same claims can serve either an epideictic or deliberative purpose depending on how they are presented. Cicero sets this concept in a Roman context when he states that the end of deliberative oratory is “both honor and advantage.

In the epideictic speech it is honor alone” (*De Inventione* 325). Used ethically—as both Aristotle and Cicero assumed rhetoric would be—the deliberative genre naturally draws upon the epideictic because of honor’s reliance on virtuous action. In addition, epideictic rhetoric can “shape or cultivate the basic codes of value and belief by which a society or culture lives” and provides the foundation for pragmatic discourse (Walker 9); these values determine the “good” that guides a speaker to what is advantageous.

For a woman in Shakespeare’s Rome, then, combining these genres allows her to emphasize the role of honor in the auditor’s deliberation; at the same time, she can make an atypical use of epideictic rhetoric to praise herself, thereby enhancing her own *ethos* and increasing her credibility as a speaker. This tactic is “atypical” because male speakers tend to establish *ethos* through a show of humility and ordinariness. Male characters who reject this tactic often appear self-aggrandizing, defensive, or cold, such as Brutus during his funeral oration in *Julius Caesar* or Coriolanus in general. In contrast, women who perform this show of humility end up reinforcing negative gender stereotypes rather than enhancing credibility; thus, careful self-praise can be a valuable tool for female speakers. For these reasons, the combination of deliberative and epideictic genres provides potential beyond what is possible with each genre on its own. By drawing attention to both the deliberative consequences and the personal epideictic stakes, a female speaker can enhance the projected consequences—good or ill—of an auditor’s decision.

Within these two genres, Shakespeare’s Roman women predominantly employ *ethos* and *pathos*. Historically, women were considered intellectually inferior to men, whether by basic biology or by their uncontrollable desires overriding rational thought (Schwarz, *What You Will* 2-3), and thus *logos* seems a naturally disadvantaged proof for

female speakers; however, despite the emphasis on reason as a more desirable, masculine trait for Roman and early modern audiences (Baker qtd. in Schwarz 42), it is not necessarily the strongest rhetorical proof for male speakers either. Throughout Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, the weakness of *logos* seems to be its distance from emotion and feeling. The early modern emphasis on eloquence and rhetorical tropes may be the result of a gradual move to bridge the gap between *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* through the artistry of poesy and its aspirations to the sublime. The power of *pathos* in early modern and classical thought is apparent in the fears of its unethical use to manipulate audiences (Wills 40),<sup>7</sup> but a strong *ethos*, by its nature, eliminates those fears. Most classical and early modern writers consider that *ethos* has a character and intentions congruent with social values and virtues, and the credibility of such a character is its own persuasive effect (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1378a). Aristotle states that "to seem virtuous suits a good person more than an exact argument does" (1418a); however, he does not explain this further, and his emphasis on *logos* throughout the *Rhetoric* speaks to the contrary. Dionysius also praises *ethos* but only takes a small step further in his explanation: "character ( *thos*) is of central significance. It is not just an incidental, to be indicated by odd remarks here and there; it must be woven into the whole texture of the speech....The battle is one of character as much as of fact" (Russell 72). Cicero describes the persuasive force of *ethos* a little more directly than Aristotle or Dionysius, claiming *ethos* "has so much influence...that it often prevails more than the merits of the cause" (*On Oratory* 2.43). In *Greek Declamation*, D. A. Russell clarifies the source of *ethos*'s influence in classical rhetoric:

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<sup>7</sup> See also Vickers 74. For more on the perceived power of *pathos* and rhetoric, see de Romilly, Jacqueline. *Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1975. Print. 25, 72-3.

The importance of character ( *thos*) in oratory was very familiar both to the Attic orators and to the early teachers of rhetoric. It was important in three ways.

First, the speaker had to project a sympathetic image of himself. He needed to seem likable and—even more important—trustworthy.

Secondly, in order to ensure that he was really making the desired impression, he had to identify and study the specific qualities of his audience—age, interests, and nationality as well as what we should call qualities of character. He had to know, for example, how they would respond to pleas based on patriotism or self-interest.

Thirdly, he had to represent the characters of his opponents, and of other people appearing in his story, in such a way as to make his narrative plausible.... (87)

The first form of *ethos* Russell mentions is the most commonly recognized, but the second and third are often missed; however, it is undeniable that the knowledge of one's audience and the ability to characterize others through speech are incredibly powerful rhetorical tools.<sup>8</sup> For Shakespeare's Roman women, these tools are all the more important given the prejudice against women's reasoning. By making *logos* and *pathos* subordinate to *ethos*, female speakers open a path to circumvent these prejudices.

Of course, my focus on *ethos* does not diminish the importance of *logos* or *pathos* in women's speech. *Ethos*, despite its own persuasive capabilities, requires the other two. Without *logos*, the consequences arrived at in deliberative rhetoric have no foundation; without *pathos*, the shame and praise described in those consequences lack immediacy. Indeed, if the deliberative is not enough to persuade these women's auditors—and it never is, at least not for any lasting persuasion—the speakers turn to epideictic rhetoric and rely heavily on shame, which Aristotle classifies under *pathos*. Because epideictic rhetoric focuses on the present rather than the future, the *pathos* of shame gains

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<sup>8</sup> For further arguments on the persuasive potential of *ethos*, see Wills 95 and Schwarz, *What You Will: Gender, Contract, and Shakespearean Social Space* 44.

immediacy and thus greater influence in the epideictic than it has in the deliberative. Still, shaming requires the rhetor to be a respected authority and exemplar of virtue, and, for this reason, a strong *ethos* is necessary for this form of *pathos* to function.

### **Creating the Virtuous *Ethos***

The virtues Shakespeare emphasizes in the Roman plays and *The Rape of Lucrece* are not fully “Roman” in the historical sense. Rather, they are an amalgamation of English sensibilities and the early modern perception of the Roman code. Rome was, as Coppélia Kahn states, “a cultural parent” for early modern England (*Roman Shakespeare* 4). This parenthood originated, physically, in the Roman occupation of England and, intellectually, in the influence of Latin and Greek literature and educational theories. The importance of a Latin education for men led to immersion in Roman culture and ideals, which in turn influenced Renaissance values, virtues, and social norms. Pagan Rome and Christian England’s values were not always compatible, however, a fact that becomes apparent in Christian reactions to Lucrece’s suicide. Christian scholars and students debated for centuries the potential justification and sinfulness of the act. St. Augustine was one of the first major Christian scholars to debate Lucrece. He believed that, because she was pure in heart and mind, her suicide was unjustified and thus sinful (Kahn, “The Rape” 38). By Shakespeare’s time, the debate had become so ubiquitous that it was a standard rhetorical exercise for schoolboys to argue both sides (Weaver 430-1). This debate turned upon the blending—and occasional disjuncture—of Roman and English virtues in early modern culture. Despite the difficulties in assimilating some Roman values, there were many values that the English and their Roman predecessors shared.



In early modern England, as in Rome, gender divisions and gendered virtues were strongly felt and culturally reinforced. A man's purview was public—economic, political, and professional—while a woman's was private, domestic, familial, and reproductive. These divisions had been in place for centuries and were long intertwined in civic values and religious beliefs, for Rome as well as England. The most important aspects of the woman's role in both societies were the maintenance of the household and continuation of the family line. The integrity of both was a central part of a man's honor as the master of his household and father of his children, and thus the woman's honor reflected directly upon her husband's. The centrality of the wife and mother to the reputation of home and family made her a symbolic representation of both, and this symbolism often extended to a metaphorical representation of the nation itself. Kahn describes the connection between female virtue and the well-being of the state by referencing Rome's Vestal Virgins: with the religious belief that Rome's sacred flame relied on the Vestals remaining secluded and pure as paragons for all women, "the very existence of the state was made symbolically dependent on the confinement of women's bodies within the institutional boundaries of marriage, family, and *domus*" (*Roman Shakespeare* 32). Women—particularly their dedication to the household and their ability to provide heirs—were the home, and, as such, any inappropriate behavior by them or threats against their virtue threatened the stability of home, family, and state. For this reason, any action a woman took that challenged this order could be considered unethical, as it put the state and other citizens at risk.

A woman's virtues, then, were primarily based on her suitability as a wife and mother within the domestic sphere, as well as her adherence to that sphere. Inherent in

these qualities was the assertion that a woman's place was within the home: the demands of raising children and managing the household would, in theory, require the majority of a married woman's time and efforts. The emphasis on women's domestic place came not only from the practicalities and symbolism of household management but also centuries-old debates over women's fortitude against sin (Keeble 1-2), as well as prejudices based on religious and biological assumptions about their mental capacities that originated with the ancient Greeks. Many Renaissance women who wrote in favor of female intellect still believed there to be a natural disparity between men and women in either potential or purpose (44-45). Thus the Roman woman and the Renaissance Englishwoman were both expected to remain in the domestic sphere, contained by the walls of home and duty and guided by civically minded and rational husbands. Quiet domesticity maintained order and female virtue, which existed in clear distinction from the civic virtues of Elizabethan and Roman men. Indeed, restriction to the home also included restriction from political action; therefore, Renaissance audiences would have seen women's open involvement in political life as improper, if not repugnant, first as a disregard of domestic duties and second as unfitting to their nature (186). Even Queen Elizabeth I faced this prejudice, and she was forced to find clever ways of acknowledging her sex while overcoming its social limitations. In her book *Gender and Heroism*, Mary Beth Rose states that Elizabeth negotiated this issue by "taking rhetorical advantage of the special prestige of both female and male subject positions...without consistently privileging either" and by "disarmingly acknowledging her femininity and then erasing it through appropriating the prestige of male kingship" (27, 34). Even where her role as the erudite "virgin queen" found its greatest praise, it also found criticism. Susan Frye articulates this duality when

she says that Elizabeth's "sovereign Chastity" as depicted in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* is "militant, compelling but unapproachable, as repellent as inspirational" (119). For example, despite Elizabeth's potential to serve as a positive example of a woman in power, she did so primarily by ignoring—cannily or not—the anxiety she caused by refusing to name or produce an heir and by separating herself ideologically from members of her own sex (100-1).<sup>9</sup> The very things that made her reign remarkable and admirable backfired on her and the female sex in many unexpected ways. In fact, Lee A. Ritscher claims that "the old patriarchal codes for feminine behavior remained, and perhaps, became more stringent than ever before" thanks to Elizabeth's reign (29). Elizabeth disrupted the concept of female virtue in the effort to overcome gendered prejudice, and in that way she is a valuable comparison for the women of Shakespeare's Rome.

In creating the *ethos* for the women in his Roman works, Shakespeare would have found several common denominators between contemporary and historical virtues. The virtues expected of the Renaissance English woman were commonly distilled into "silence, patience, discretion, piety, modesty and chastity" (Keeble 96). Similarly, those expected of the Roman noblewoman included "industry, humility, chastity, self-discipline, responsibility towards servants, solicitude for her husband" (Miola 24). Shakespeare's awareness of the Roman woman's virtues would have come from deduction rather than behavioral treatises; indeed, Roman texts do not identify female virtues so much as identify female vices. Cicero has little to say about female virtues, and, although Tacitus provides more direct commentary on feminine behavior, he also

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<sup>9</sup> For more on Elizabeth I and gender, see Brown and McBride 133 and Frye 15.

grants much more attention to female vices than virtues. When Tacitus does speak of virtuous women, he rarely describes them as anything more than simply decorous or chaste. The story of Lucrece was perhaps one of the best sources for Roman female virtues, because Lucrece either enacts or is reputed to show each of the qualities listed above in all of her iterations. Her ubiquitous virtue made her a role model for both Roman and Renaissance authors and their shared norms of female behavior.

Of all these shared virtues between Rome and early modern England, perhaps the most intertwined were “silence, patience, discretion...[and] modesty” in conjunction with “solicitude for her husband” (Keeble 96; Miola 24). A woman in both cultures was to obey her husband and act with decorum at home and in public. She was not to speak publically or criticize her husband. Women who did otherwise were considered “shrews” in early modern England and were the subject of numerous popular plays and ballads. Frances E. Dolan, discussing *The Taming of the Shrew*, emphasizes that the truest marker of the shrew was improper speech: “talking too much, or too loudly and publicly, or too crossly for a woman” (9). In a small and unusual concession, the Renaissance work *Anatomy of a Woman’s Tongue* states that a woman’s tongue “although a member bad, / Was all the ‘fensive weapon that she had” (qtd. in Dolan 9), thereby acknowledging the conflict between the ideal of the silent woman and her reality. The limitations of these “virtues” and the prejudices against women speaking in public are apparent in Shakespeare’s Rome as well, when Volumnia and Virgilia ineffectively attempt to scold the tribunes for exiling Coriolanus. The tribunes repeatedly malign the women’s sanity, such as when they ask, “Why stay we to be baited / With one that wants her wits?” (*Coriolanus* 4.2.46-7); even Menenius, who sympathizes with the women, begs, “Peace,

peace, be not so loud” (4.2.14). If a woman speaks out publically, she is considered indecorous if not insane, but speaking is often the only way she can create change or bring attention to wrongs and injustices. The equation of silence with decorum—without which all of a woman’s other virtues are devalued—is the fulcrum upon which the paradox of women’s rhetoric and rhetorical ethics turns.

Despite the overpowering importance of silence, the other virtues composing the female *ethos* are no less important. Domestic order relied heavily on the virtues Robert Miola designates as essentially “Roman”: industry, self-discipline, and responsibility towards servants, all of which were expected of wives in both ancient Rome and early modern England (Brown and McBride 113). As previously stated, the center of a woman’s duty was the household: supporting her husband, family, and state by maintaining the home. Again, Lucrece is an obvious role model: she is seen to be disciplined and industrious—diligently spinning—in her husband’s absence and seems to respect and be respected by her servants (*The Rape of Lucrece*, “The Argument”). Other ways for upper-class women to demonstrate these virtues were managing household finances or acting as teachers or tutors (O’Day 221; Brown and McBride 93); however, a woman’s educational responsibilities would have remained within a home and been restricted to boys too young for school and girls of all ages. Shakespeare provides an example of a female educator in Lavinia. Her uncle states that she helped instruct her nephew in poetry and Cicero (*Titus Andronicus* 4.1.12-14), and Titus remarks that she has an education far advanced of a boy Lucius’s age (33). Lavinia’s unusually advanced education and tutoring therefore shows signs of both discipline and industry on her part as well as her family’s more progressive views on female education. This odd

progressiveness, even into subjects which might be considered indecorous for a woman,<sup>10</sup> marks a trend for Shakespeare's women where exceptional virtue seems to provide some added freedoms or forgiveness in other respects; this is an important consideration for the paradox of female speech.

The virtue of piety or, in Latin, *pietas*, clarifies the importance of female domestic virtues to societal order. Piety for Rome and England extended beyond religion to “the loving respect owed to family, country, and gods” (Miola 17), and it was on this concept that social order depended. For Cicero, the priority of these obligations worked in descending order: “The first duty is owed to the immortal gods, the second to our country, the third to our parents, and others to the rest on a descending scale” (*On Obligations* 54). In comparison, a woman in the Renaissance would have served God and country best by a virtuous life in service to her family and husband. Indeed, a woman's submission to her husband was often described as equivalent to the relationship between a daughter and a father (Greenblatt 3), and so, in a way, her duty to her husband replaced that owed to her parents. Attempts to rebel against this submissive role by seeking “authority” or “asserting her independence” made a woman appear more as a “usurper” than a claimant for equality (Dolan 10). As Rome viewed the Vestals, early modern England viewed the family as a microcosm of the kingdom or nation, where consistent problems on the smaller scale evince problems on the larger; thus a disruptive, impious wife could be a symbol or cause of greater social disorder (Richardson 18-19). This correlation dictated many of the rules about women's submission to their husbands during the Renaissance, as well as their role in contributing to domestic order.

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<sup>10</sup> For more on Lavinia's education, see Oakley-Brown 8.

Shakespeare's Roman plays dramatize the potential conflicts in piety's order of obligation by highlighting the problems of favoring the country over family and vice versa. Indeed, conflict of obligation is simplified and heightened thanks to the reduced focus on religion: according to Michael Platt, "...the religion of [Shakespeare's] Rome is civil and binds the Romans to their city, not to some invisible realm beyond the world. Roman religion is a political religion and in Rome the city is all" (307). The primary conflict characters face is the divergence of public and domestic obligations, but in Rome the public good is elevated nearly to the realm of divinity. Unfortunately, the expectations of the state are nearly always in opposition to the needs or desires of the individual, and the increased importance of the city and civic duty raises rebellion or neglect to the level of sacrilege, a theme we see clearly in the treatment of Tarquin's rape of Lucrece and Coriolanus's march on Rome. These extreme situations, where men fail the ethical obligations toward Rome, necessitate women's speech; however, these situations provide some of the clearest examples of the paradox inherent in the ethics and norms influencing female speech. Altman states that an ethics of improbability undermines the rhetorical circumstances that make that ethics possible, and the ethics of women's speech suffers in similar form: the women in Shakespeare's Rome speak with ethical intentions to turn men away from immoral or rebellious acts, but speaking out—particularly as an authority over a man—is ethically questionable and potentially damaging to her *ethos*.

The final virtue, while technically an expected part of silence and domesticity, often receives the most attention. Chastity can be threatened by a woman's failure to uphold other virtues, but on its own, chastity acts as one of—if not *the*—most powerful

and respected source of female *ethos*; in addition, the loss of it affects the honor and shame of both the woman and her family. In Shakespeare's works, chastity comes in two forms, depending on the woman's single or married status. For a single woman, chastity was virginity until marriage (although the Renaissance distinction of connubial rights between marriage and engagement were known to be somewhat lax), and, for a married woman, faithfulness to her husband (Ritscher 15). The importance of primogeniture and patrilineal inheritance to England's system placed heavy emphasis on female chastity. For Shakespeare's Rome, chastity's importance was similarly if not more patriarchal (Kahn, "The Rape" 23; Greenstadt 62), given the symbolic connection between wifely chastity and the chastity of Rome's Vestal Virgins (Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare* 33). Aside from being sexually chaste, women "performed" chastity by dressing modestly and acting with quiet decorum. According to Juan Luis Vives' *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae*, the primary treatise for feminine behavior in early modern England, public speech and extravagant dress were immediate signs of sexual license (Ritscher 11, 15). For this reason, the association of silence, female decorum, and chastity was based more on encouraging modest behavior against women's perceived "lack of control" than on a requirement for actual "silence" (Richardson 19-20). Chastity—and the proper performance of it—was central to a woman's *ethos* in both societies, a fact which we see repeatedly indicated in description, symbolism, Petrarchan clichés, and, perhaps most clearly, fear aroused by unchaste women.

The lack of faith in women's chastity stems from women's perceived failure in one key virtue: constancy. Kahn defines women's "lack" of constancy as a belief deeply embedded in social norms and prejudices: "Women—untrained in reason, dwellers in the



*domus*, excluded from the forum, and susceptible in the extreme to the affections—lack access to ‘constancy,’ meaning control over the affections, adherence to rationally-grounded principles like those of the republic, firmness” (*Roman Shakespeare* 97). Ritscher adds that “*unconstant* also connotes a lack of faithfulness in love or marriage” in England (79), tying the elusiveness of constancy for women to contemporary fears of rampant unchasteness. This presumed lack of constancy—and its underlying qualities of rationality, chastity, and fortitude—in women’s characters reinforces the importance of a virtuous female *ethos* that can overcome the weaknesses associated with femininity and the female sex. Without constancy, women’s logic is presumed to be poor or faulty, and her emotional pleas are presumed to be mere affection or weakness. Regardless of virtue, women are seen as illogical, emotional, and untrustworthy in matters of great import. They cannot act or speak within the realm of male honor because their honor—if they have it at all—is always dubious, whether in terms of reason and emotional fortitude or chastity.

This pervasive doubt about female virtue is one of the greatest threats to female speakers. Male anxiety over an unfaithful or unchaste woman—even if she is only believed to be so—creates conflicts in many of Shakespeare’s and other Renaissance playwrights’ works. Accusations that a woman had been raped or had committed adultery carried with them the stigma of the unchaste. Suspicion alone could destroy a woman’s honor and *ethos*. Wrongly suspected adulteresses like Shakespeare’s Desdemona, Hero, and Hermione find themselves facing hateful language describing them as useless, corrupt, or evil (Bamber 3; Keeble 71). This treatment is enough to destroy both their public reputations and their own self-worth: according to Ewan Fernie, “The basis of

female shame is unchastity or a reputation for unchastity” (84). Victims of rape faced similar prejudices. For the female victim, speaking about sexuality or rape went against the rules of decorum, to the point that even trying to speak of it “proved” she was unchaste; thus, she became not a victim but a consenting partner in adultery (Greenstadt 63; Ritscher 12-13). Because of this conflation of rape and adultery, attempting to seek justice for rape not only put a woman’s chastity and honor into question but also damaged her family’s reputation. The fragility of the female reputation proves the crucial role chastity played in a woman’s rhetorical *ethos* and agency: “Chastity conveys worth and potential influence, and the removal of this value is in effect the removal of potential power” (Carter 32), and thus an unassailable reputation for such virtue is perhaps a woman’s greatest asset and also her greatest defense when she does choose to speak.

For all the emphasis on silence, domesticity, and chastity in social order, staying silent was not always the ethical choice for a woman, especially in situations necessitating self-protection, the pursuit of justice, or the protection of others’ well-being. Ancient sources like Plutarch contain many accounts of women’s condoned—if not praised—public speech in ancient Greece and in republican and imperial Rome. According to Bradley Buszard, Plutarch’s examples of admirable, outspoken noblewomen share distinctive qualities and circumstances:

The women for whom he writes his speeches have three traits in common .... First, the motives of these women are uniformly unselfish: they never speak for themselves, but on behalf of their husbands, fathers, brothers, and children. Second, all are members of the elite, the daughters of eminent families, the wives of prominent statesmen, even queens. Because their husbands, fathers, and sons are public figures, their families’ needs necessarily impinge upon civic matters. Third, all are beset by extraordinary dangers. Their remarkable behavior is necessitated and

excused by the horrific situations threatening them, their families, and their communities. (112)

Foremost amongst these criteria, he says, is that the women “are moved to speak by personal and public crises” (84). Personal or national exigency allows bending or breaking certain rules of decorum, thus indicating that acting for the family or greater good in a time of crisis falls within a woman’s moral and civic duty. Buszard also states that these women’s speeches are worth discussing because of their “narrative importance” in the *Lives* (84). These women cannot be removed from the story or history without it losing critical information, and their role in influencing powerful family members gives their voices greater social impact. The third trait, extreme need, supports the previous two in that it marks the unusual nature of these situations and speakers, as well as these women’s actions as exceptions to the rules for feminine decorum. The most basic ethical challenge for Shakespeare’s female speakers is establishing their right to transgress normative limits in the face of dire threats to nation and family.

This right to transgress finds its best ethical expression in Cicero’s *On Obligations*, which had an undeniable influence on Renaissance thought (Beauregard 42), and, indeed, Shakespeare repeatedly tests honor and its associated virtues in an ever-troubled Rome. He does so in a way perfectly in line with Cicero’s concerns: as stated in the introduction, *On Obligations* weighs the *honestum* against the *utile*. Marcia Colish states that, although early modern scholars and writers often misconstrued Cicero and Stoicism by believing both placed honor equal to or above the useful, Cicero in fact preferred the useful: “...he elevates the *utile* to the level of an ethical criterion in its own right, making it the norm of the *honestum*” (86). In other words, that which is useful—valuable to the state and one’s civic duty—is always honorable, but what is honorable

may not always be useful; thus the *utile* is, contrary to expectations, more honorable than *honestum* because what is useful sets a high priority on the greater good of the state. In the plays and *The Rape of Lucrece*, women's rhetoric attempts to re-balance the *honestum* and *utile* for male auditors. Shakespeare's Roman men often face a conflict between a romanticized conception of honor-bound Stoicism—which Cicero considered “inhuman and unattainable in practice” (Colish 86-87)—and the greater good. On its own, the *honestum* is not necessarily problematic: according to Cicero, the virtue of honor is founded on wisdom, the protection of home and country, a powerful and “lofty” will (7), and “moderation and self-control” (8). The problem arises in the difference between Cicero's definition and *romanitas*, the romanticized Roman conception of a man of honor. Kahn, drawing on previous scholars, defines it as “ethically orientated...well described by G. K. Hunter as ‘a set of virtues, thought of as characterizing Roman civilization—soldierly, severe, self-controlled, self-disciplined ...’” (*Roman Shakespeare* 13).<sup>11</sup> Despite its cultural intention as a guide to ethical citizenship and service, *romanitas* places a much higher emphasis on military service compared to Cicero's focus on civil service; the result is a greater emphasis on the problematically individualistic qualities of pride and courage versus Cicero's more moderate version of a “lofty” will. Because courage and pride are the characteristics that privilege the *honestum* over the *utile* and the personal over the public, military service and action are the site of conflict for the Roman male identity in Shakespeare. The ethical goal of women's rhetoric in Shakespeare's Rome is thus the reassertion of order for the well-being of their male family members and their countries.

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<sup>11</sup> See also Miola 46.

Similarly, the thing that makes women exceptional in Plutarch is not rhetorical ability, but the selflessness of aiding the state in these dire situations and speaking for others' well-being rather than their own interests. Comparing Plutarch's Porcia—Brutus's wife, who appears as "Portia" in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*—and the *Iliad*'s Andromache, Buszard states that "Brutus' wife is distinguished by her moral courage and civic responsibility, while Andromache can only see the consequences for herself and her son" (86): thus, Porcia is admirable and Andromache not. Not all of Shakespeare's women are so farsighted, but the best or most virtuous of his speakers, like Porcia, focus beyond their personal fears. By these rules, an ethical speaker should acknowledge her personal interests, but in the end speak and act for what she perceives to be the greater good, even when the personal costs are devastating.

Shakespeare's portrayal of advisement as a virtuous civic duty does not originate solely in ancient sources: the Renaissance saw service and guidance to lords and rulers as a critical part of service to the state. Male and female courtiers advised superiors toward virtue, and thus noblewomen's civic duty in the Middle Ages and Renaissance involved acting privately as advisors or intercessors, usually speaking to husbands or other family members on behalf of relatives, other kingdoms, or even the papacy (Ramsey). Advisement, through letters or private conversation, functioned as a decorous forum for women to promote certain political decisions or correct improper behavior. In Shakespeare's Rome, women's rhetoric often follows the forms of advisement associated with the noble courtier of the Renaissance, and Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* sets out the ideal for the behavior of Renaissance courtiers in a monarchical court. For a gentlewoman, the goal was to "be francke and free" instructing superiors in virtue and

advising against vice, flattery, and dishonor (372-3). Castiglione also emphasizes the importance of virtue in the speaker. He posits that a gentlewoman should “have a good grace of nature in all her doings, to be of good condicyons, wyttye, foreseeyng, not haughtie, not envious, not yll tunded, not light, not contentious, not untowardlye ...” (216). All of these provisions echo the typical virtues expected of women, thereby reinforcing the concept that virtue and decorum are crucial to a respectable and persuasive female *ethos*. The addition that she must also be intelligent and able to determine the consequences of her own and other’s actions recalls Buszard’s contrast of Porcia and Andromache: the awareness of such consequences beyond the immediate and personal makes the advisor all the more wise and admirable. All of these qualities are necessary to the virtuous female *ethos*, without which women cannot play the role of the gentlewoman-courtier, advising—or even pleading with—auditors in superior positions.

### **The Shakespearean Twist on Emulation**

Using *ethos* for persuasion is not so simple, however, as merely having virtue. For women as well as men, a speaker’s *ethos* can be established in two different ways: habit and speech. Jenell Johnson compares the two forms as they appear in Aristotle’s work, and she states that “*ethos* is not fixed: it could be cultivated by virtuous habits, as Aristotle advises in the *Ethics* (1103a17) and also constructed rhetorically by exhibiting practical wisdom, virtue, and goodwill for the audience, attributes of character that emerge ‘from the speech, not from a previous opinion that the speaker is a certain kind of person’ (*Rhetoric* 1356a4)” (463). According to Joel Altman, Roman culture emphasizes habitual *ethos*, particularly via a man’s “own social reputation and that of his family” (67). The nature of habitual *ethos* makes the family’s *ethos* interdependent and reliant on

public perception. Shakespeare makes use of both habitually and rhetorically established *ethos*, however, in part because the creation of habitual *ethos* on stage functions as sound dramatic practice by introducing the audience to unfamiliar characters and priming the audience's reception of these characters' words and actions. Verbally asserted *ethos* becomes necessary when habitual *ethos* is insufficiently developed or authoritative on its own, the latter of which often affects female speech. Buszard claims that one of the qualities shared by Plutarch's notable Greek and Roman female orators is the capacity of their words to "reveal the character of the speaker" (85); their *ethos* is developed through rhetoric and performance. In many of the major speeches in the Roman plays and *The Rape of Lucrece*, Shakespeare models his own versions of North's translation of Plutarch, and at times he directly plagiarizes; thus, this quality in Plutarch's accounts often remains intact in Shakespeare's adaptations. Women's effective speeches do as much or more to characterize the speaker and build her *ethos* as they do to advance the play's or poem's plot. In addition, their oratory also helps to characterize the auditor: Portia's speech to Brutus almost exclusively characterizes herself and her husband, with no argument about Brutus's pending decision to act against Caesar. In the end, *ethos* is often the point—the more immediate rhetorical end—of these women's arguments, because they are fighting an initial battle simply to be heard and taken seriously. This is why *ethos* and the authority and credibility it may garner are so important to women's ability to advise and persuade.

Whether a speaker's *ethos* comes from habitual action or the speech itself, it consists of three basic elements: good will (*eunoia*), wisdom (*phronesis*), and virtue (*areté*) (Aristotle 1378a5). For early modern women, there existed a distinct hierarchy of

rhetorical efficacy among these elements. While a woman might be considered wise within her sex, her wisdom was still culturally questionable, and so goodwill and virtue became her stronger suits; however, goodwill specific to a given situation can be exhibited only through speech and often relies on a foundation of virtue. Thus, virtue—exhibited in action, speech, or both—can strengthen presentations of both wisdom and goodwill. As we will discuss in the following chapter, speech gives each woman the opportunity to expand upon her habitual *ethos* as well as the qualities of wisdom and goodwill; still, Shakespeare often goes to great lengths to establish female characters' habitual *ethos* through other characters' general conversations and exposition. The evidence he provides through action and other characters' testimony emphasizes the virtues and vices that create a good or bad female *ethos* while establishing the potential for such an *ethos* to compel others or enhance credibility. Simply yet ingeniously, as Shakespeare's works demonstrate, women skirt some prejudice just by focusing attention on the qualities of character for which they are praised, thereby creating an *ethos* of moral integrity based on female virtues. Despite all of these means for constructing a virtuous *ethos*, however, even the purest of Shakespeare's Roman women find it rhetorically insufficient for persuasion.

Because women were considered to be lacking in reason and emotional fortitude, emulation is crucial to successful female persuasion in Shakespeare's Rome. Women's inherent rhetorical advantages lie solely in the projection of themselves as virtuous, caring individuals, but this identity disallows—if not *disavows*—more authoritative, “masculine” rhetoric and virtues of logical credibility. Like Queen Elizabeth, Shakespeare's most effective female rhetoricians take full advantage of their female



authority and virtues but do not hesitate to adapt and commandeer the masculine virtues available to them, whether by emulating their male auditors' virtues or the general virtues of *romanitas*. In this way, Shakespeare's women elide "feminine weaknesses" by emulating masculine virtues, particularly those held in high esteem by their male auditors. This emulation, however, must be based in speech. Even Volumnia, who—among the Roman women—perhaps comes closest to cultivating a habitual *ethos* that assimilates masculine virtues without eliding her femininity, must constantly reassert that *ethos* through rhetoric; however, when rhetorical emulation is performed correctly—or at least persuasively—the *ethos* that results creates an optimal position from which a female speaker can advise or shame her auditors. If we accept that the gendered nature of "male" virtues is a matter of performance—of action and choices—rather than an unalienable, inherent quality, then male virtues are simply a part of Judith Butler's "stylized repetition of acts" that can be embodied by any person who uses "bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds [to] constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (*Gender Trouble* 149); in this case, the emulation creates a persona that signifies desirable traits of both male and female genders simultaneously. Indeed, as Butler states, "If gender is constructed, could it be constructed differently, or does its constructedness imply some form of social determinism, foreclosing the possibility of agency and transformation?" (7). Shakespeare's Rome attempts to enforce this social determinism, and so the women who can enact this performance transgress norms and face dire consequences in order to achieve that "agency and transformation."

Coppélia Kahn, in her discussion of Roman male emulation in *Roman Shakespeare*, uses the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s definition for emulation: "to copy or

imitate with the object of equaling or excelling” (*OED* qtd. in Kahn 15). She also references Wayne Rebhorn, who claims that emulation is central to the English nobleman’s public status and persona, although it is Kahn who identifies the qualities of English imitation and rivalry specifically as “emulation” (91). Essentially, emulation is a male-gendered performance in which one man imitates another of higher standing or status, hoping to learn and improve on that man’s example and eventually surpass him. Shakespeare’s female rhetors employ a sort of shortcut form of emulation, through which they can match and potentially threaten their auditors’ *ethos* by “equaling or excelling” it. With male audiences, female characters use this form of emulation to help overcome arguments against female rationality and constancy by laying claim to their male auditors’ *virtus*. By rhetorically melding her *ethos* with her auditor’s through emulation, a female speaker becomes his other—but morally better—half, thereby gaining access to his rationality, courage, and constancy. This seemingly miraculous transformation is achieved largely through the evolving Renaissance conception of wives and husbands as partners (Carter 55), to which Portia appeals, but it could also be gained through the long-established educational and respectful relationship between mother and son (O’Day 241-2; Richardson 20). Because the partnership and esteem expected in these relationships is a social norm within Shakespeare’s Roman setting, this form of emulation is, under general circumstances, entirely ethical; however, emulation can also involve more martial virtues and physical methods of establishing constancy, at which point the ethical nature of the rhetorical means comes into question. We will address this problem in chapter three.

The speaker's use of the auditor's virtues and martial action are not the only ways Shakespeare's women could employ emulation. Emulation technically falls under *pathos* in Aristotle's definitions of the emotions a speaker can evoke: "...emulation is [defined as] a kind of distress at the apparent presence among others like him by nature of things honored and possible for a person to acquire, [with the distress arising] not from the fact that another has them but that the emulator does not (thus emulation is a good thing and characteristic of good people...)" (*Rhetoric* 1388a). The *ethos* at play in emulation is thus as much the speaker's action upon her own character as it is a rhetorical manipulation of her audience; as such, it involves the secondary and tertiary qualities of *ethos* Russell mentions in his discussion of the proof. Because women's rhetoric is as much a challenge to be heard as to persuade, her auditor is, in a sense, her rhetorical opponent, even if there is no debate or ill will between the two of them. Thus, emulation directly involves all three elements of *ethos*: characterizing the self, knowing the audience, and characterizing the opponent (Russell 87). Emulation creates distress by establishing a lack or personal failing in the audience, and so it indirectly motivates the auditor by making the speaker's *ethos* and the object of her persuasion desirable: in other words, when the woman becomes a person worthy of emulation, her rhetorical goals become more worthy and persuasive in the eyes—and ears—of her auditor. Instead of being a supplicant, the female rhetor is now a true equal—if not a moral superior—who can both advise and, if necessary, shame her audience in order to move it toward her rhetorical ends. She has transcended the cultural limitations of her sex without sacrificing her *ethos* or her identity as a woman.

## The Impact of Shame

Depending on the female speaker's success in emulation, she can potentially surpass her auditor's *ethos*. Even if she does not attain this superiority, successful emulation enhances her respectability enough to make use of the second rhetorical technique crucial to rhetorical success for women in Shakespeare's Rome: shame. As stated in the introduction, Aristotle defines shame as a fear of losing reputation or suffering a low opinion from others (*Rhetoric* 1384a-b). In that vein, he states that "the people before whom we feel shame are those whose opinion of us matters to us. Such persons are: those who admire us, those whom we admire, those by whom we wish to be admired, those with whom we are competing, and those whose opinion of us we respect" (1384a). Successful emulation by a virtuous, respected wife or mother effectively allows her to fill each and every one of those roles, and so her virtue, status, and ability to manipulate the components of Roman masculinity make her shaming a powerful rhetorical force. Women shaming men by behaving as equals or betters actually has historical precedent in the texts Shakespeare read, particularly Plutarch's essay "On the Bravery of Women." Plutarch respectfully marks several instances of women taking action to protect their hometowns or their own honor, and even Castiglione, in his handbook of Renaissance decorum, refers to the Sabine women with deep respect (240).<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Tacitus speaks well of several women who attempted or committed suicide in order to show solidarity or resist tyranny, such as Seneca's wife Pompeia Paulina, whose

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<sup>12</sup> The Sabine women were captured and taken as wives by Roman soldiers. When their fathers and brothers attacked Rome to avenge and save them, the women rushed between the armies and brokered peace, thereby protecting their families, both old and new.

desire to die with him Seneca called a “noble example” (15.63).<sup>13</sup> A woman abandoning decorum’s decree against public action was thus acceptable in moments of dire need, especially when exigency or men’s failures to act—or act appropriately—demanded it. These women’s motivations are often repeated in Shakespeare’s Rome, and, thus, the ethics involved in similar public situations remains uncompromised, at least initially. Given this context, by taking such action, a woman could shame male auditors for cowardice, ruthlessness, or inaction, without necessarily undermining her ethical foundation.

Shaming is, to a large extent, the dissuasive counterpart to emulation: where the latter encourages certain behaviors, the former discourages others. If emulation gives the audience something to strive towards, shame indicates what should be avoided at all costs. Technically, “contempt” is Aristotle’s opposite of emulation, and contempt provides the source of shame: one who shames feels contempt for the subject, and the effectively shamed subject feels contempt for him- or herself (*On Rhetoric* 1388a). Aristotle also explains how shame depends on either self-reflection or another person’s attitude toward the subject, whether that other person applies the shame or simply witnesses it:

Let shame...be [defined as] a sort of pain and agitation concerning the class of evils, whether present or past or future, that seem to bring a person into disrespect....If what has been defined is shame, necessarily being shamed applies to such evils as seem [in the eyes of others] to be disgraceful to a person or one about whom he cares. (1383b)

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<sup>13</sup> For the example of Sextia, wife of Scaurus, see *The Annals* 6.29; for Sextia, mother-in-law of Lucius Vetus, and his wife Pollutia, see *The Annals* 16.10.

Because shame can exist as a concern for both the present and the future, it is perfectly suited to dissuasion in deliberative rhetoric and blaming in epideictic. In addition, the public nature of shame is important to the emulative aspect of women's rhetoric and the public nature of Roman men's lives. To return to a quote from the previous chapter, Aristotle states,

Since shame is imagination...about a loss of reputation and for its own sake, not for its results, and since no one cares about reputation [in the abstract] but on account of those who hold an opinion of him, necessarily a person feels shame toward those whose opinion he takes account of.  
(1384a)

In more recent theory, this is the investment or "interest" that Silvan Thomkins defines in his discussion of shame as affect (Sedgwick, Kosofsky, and Frank 137-8). Shame's effectiveness stems from this "interest," from the people one "takes account of": because the person feeling shame is invested in those who see him or her, that person is inclined to remove the "tension between the positive affect [interest] and the heightened negative awareness of the face of the self" by remedying whatever he or she has done to garner the shame (138).

The use of shame for deliberative goals is not an uncommon tactic, for Aristotle states that "what one might propose in deliberation becomes encomia [praise] when the form of expression is changed" (*Rhetoric* 1368a), and shame is simply the other side of the coin to encomia's praise. Shame and the act of shaming serve as both dissuasive consequence and immediate reprimand within the deliberative speech, which thereby capitalize upon Aristotle's recognition of shame as a strong deterrent (1358b). In Shakespeare's Rome especially, because of the importance of honor and social distinction to a masculine Roman identity, avoiding shame is a powerful motivator, whether that

shame comes as a later consequence or an immediate condemnation from a person whose opinion and respect carry weight with the auditor. The rhetorical power of shame, therefore, lies in its potential as a motivating force that can either drive the auditor to restore lost honor or dissuade him from losing it in the first place, and it is a power that Shakespeare's Romans cannot ignore. As Fernie says, for Rome and Greece, "...issues of personal dignity and integrity, ignominy and self-loss are their single most important concern" (29), and a defining factor of shame in Shakespeare is its ability to undermine social identity (Cluck 143; Fernie 13). This particular threat motivates its audiences with great force, but the dissuasiveness of future shame is not always enough. For this reason, the epideictic turn becomes a necessary part of the Roman women's successful rhetoric.

Although epideictic speeches of open blame are atypical for male speakers, who usually use the genre for funeral orations and encomiums (Weaver 239-40), the negative side of *epideixis* has a thoroughly grounded history in medieval and Renaissance texts in the female complaint. This poetic mode recounted tales of women wronged by powerful men (Dubrow, "Mirror" 401) who left them no recourse but apostrophic complaints for divine justice (Kerrigan 33). This literary mode provides *The Rape of Lucrece* with much of its inspiration: Lucrece's monologues to time, opportunity, and night echo the complaint tradition (Chernaik 48-9; Weaver 421), but, as William Weaver points out, these subjects are also Lucrece's "means of rhetorical invention" that lead to the rhetorical success of her final speech (423-4).<sup>14</sup> The ability of Shakespeare's female speakers to break away from complaint and employ the deliberative and epideictic genres for a specific and real audience marks them as women of agency, taking decisive action

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<sup>14</sup> For more on Lucrece engaging in purposeful rhetorical exercises, see Weaver 421-2.

to seek real justice or prevent events before they occur. Thus, a deciding factor in a female speaker's rhetorical success is the rejection of the solitary, retrospective complaint in favor of direct shaming to change the present course of events.

While deliberative shame offers powerfully dissuasive future consequences, shame proves most effective in the epideictic present. Of course, shame inherently serves the epideictic genre as a result of epideictic blame, and in this mode shame focuses on past or current behavior—usually betraying or failing to live up to social roles or virtues—rather than the possible consequences of future action. This gives epideictic shame not only greater immediacy, but also forces the auditor to actually experience that shame rather than simply fear its potential existence. This shame is no longer a possibility to be avoided: it exists in the moment and can only be removed by acquiescing to the speaker's will. The immediacy of shame in this situation grants the epideictic turn its remarkable power to gain or retain the auditor's personal investment, especially for women who have established an *ethos* worthy of respect. When used correctly, shame can threaten the greatest consequences possible for an upper-class Roman: the contempt of those he respects, loss of status, and possibly even the loss of his citizenship and legacy. So long as he wishes to retain others' interest and his social identity, the auditor *must* accede to the speaker, a case that Coriolanus's acquiescence to his mother will prove in particular.

Although shaming would seem to be “untowardly” or “yll tongued” and therefore undesirable in a noblewoman's conduct (Castiglione 216), it is not necessarily a breach of etiquette. There are a few ways in which shame—when used appropriately—still falls under guidance and decorum rather than shrewish scolding. The key distinction



between the two is a clear concern for the greater good. The “good” ends of persuasion are—ostensibly—beneficial to more than just the speaker. For Aristotle good ends and good means go hand-in-hand, but Crider, in his discussion of the ethics of persuasion, notes a number of more flexible interpretations (109-10). Regardless of flexibility in means, however, the “greater good” remains the ultimate goal for ethical action, from the philosophers of classical antiquity to the oft-maligned Machiavelli (Colish 92). Indeed, although shaming men might seem to upend social order, the good, ethical speakers among the Roman women push the boundaries of that system in order to ultimately reinforce it. For this reason, it seems that goodwill and good ends authorize “indecorous” female agency under the correct circumstances, just as the “remarkable behavior” of Plutarch’s notable women escapes criticism.

The ethical key to shaming thus lies in its use: threats of dishonor act as disciplinary reinforcement of cultural values, not as humiliation. Shame in this case becomes a key component in resolving the conflict between public and private obligations, the *utile* and the *honestum*, and the fracturing of the socially determined identity and the self-determined one. Arlene Saxonhouse, working from classical Greek discussions of shame, identifies the positive role shame plays in a community:

As a social emotion, shame inhibits actions, keeps private what is private, and enables political life. [...] by inhibiting, shame restrains our freedom of action and speech, but without shame we would live as those men described by Protagoras, having the technical crafts, but using those crafts only to take advantage of and kill one another. (70)

For Saxonhouse, shame is society’s means of moral regulation. It acts as a deterrent to unethical or immoral behavior, but it is only effective when those deeds risk visibility.

Immorality, however, is not the only subject of shame: shame also targets “vulnerabilities, weaknesses, and inadequacies” (73), which are, for two reasons in particular, especially applicable points of shaming in Shakespeare’s Rome. The first of these reasons is that Shakespeare mostly depicts Rome as a pre-Christian “shame-culture,” an honor-bound society in which “public esteem is the greatest good, and to be ill spoken of the greatest evil” (Taylor 54). The second reason is that the shame employed by Roman women often aims to correct everything from misdeeds to “inadequacies,” from unethical actions to failing social expectations. Saxonhouse’s definition identifies one other important point for this argument: shame’s ability to control the subject’s action or restrict his or her freedom. This power is the crux of female agency. If she uses shame effectively, her auditor is no longer in control of his actions: the woman, as a representative of social obligation and visibility, controls him, essentially taking his agency upon herself. The irony in this dynamic is that the use of shame ultimately reinforces the very social norms that restrict women’s agency in the first place.

Shame in these works, then, is rooted in drawing attention to a person’s failure to meet social expectations, or, more specifically, in attacking the auditor’s inability or refusal to follow and enact certain virtues or expectations. Shaming attacks the auditor’s ability to fulfill the social role defined by the balance of the *utile* with the *honestum* and *romanitas*; in turn, this attack undermines the auditor’s sense of self. This threat is so powerful that it can succeed when all other efforts have failed. Shame offers a decided negative change in status that can be implemented immediately if the speaker has used emulation appropriately. By excelling her auditor and then shaming him for failures of virtue, the female speaker signifies the auditor’s comparative unworthiness. Combined

with the fact that sufficient shame can threaten the very identity on which a male auditor's past accomplishments are based, emulation and shame have the potential to completely unmake a male auditor. The danger of this absolute loss—of the speaker's respect and the auditor's social identity—can easily overpower an auditor's resistance to persuasion.

The corrective aspect of shame provides an ethical element to its rhetorical use, but there is another facet to the ethics of shame. Female speakers always face the ethical conflict that speaking up breaks their basic social obligations of silence and submission; however, refusing to speak up neglects their obligations to serve and protect family and state. This potential conflict is resolvable because choosing to act for the state in spite of the personal or familial risk places their actions squarely in the realm of the *utile*. Even here, however, the ethics are not always clear: Lucrece sacrifices herself for the sake of her family's honor and, in doing so, unwillingly risks inciting rebellion, yet the monarchy challenged by her death is itself unethical in its tyranny and corruption. In contrast, Volumnia chooses the safety of Rome over her son's corrupted sense of honor, but in the process—knowingly or not—she endangers his life. These no-win scenarios trouble the ethics and tactics of women's rhetoric. As in Barbara Correll's discussion of "Romanicity" in *Coriolanus*, this conflict of obligation is "always already dysfunctional, perhaps even irredeemably so, even as it remains a power to answer to" (31). Despite this dysfunction, the attempt to restore balance between the *honestum* and the *utile* is necessary for the survival of Rome's status quo; by identifying their auditors' failures to maintain this balance, female speakers use shame as a means to restore it.

### From Technique to Practice

Shakespeare's best female Roman speakers attempt to address ethical concerns while enhancing their persuasiveness. First, each woman establishes her *ethos* based on her virtue. Second, she employs emulation—through rhetorical or performative means—to match or excel the virtue and reputation of her auditor. Third, she ends her speech with shaming, presenting through deliberative or epideictic speech the possible consequence of the loss or destruction of the auditor's *ethos*. Employing this method overcomes the prejudices against the female sex by stressing accepted female virtues and emulating the masculine qualities best suited to argumentation. Thus the successful female rhetor persuades by attacking the auditor's failures to fulfill the appropriate social identity or obligation.

In Shakespeare's Rome, the demands of ideal masculine and feminine virtues repeatedly clash with necessity while public obligations war with domestic ones. For female characters in particular, social perceptions of femininity make it difficult to speak or act on these obligations, even to protect country or family. Despite the societal limitations on female speech and action, women's speech is their primary form of agency, and the very virtues that restrict Shakespeare's Roman women paradoxically form the foundation for their persuasiveness. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler speaks of this paradox as a form of oppression in gendered identity: "Discourse becomes oppressive when it requires that the speaking subject, in order to speak, participate in the very terms of that oppression" (116); however, she also states that the subject is not powerless in this situation. Indeed, she claims,

The subject is not *determined* by the rules through which it is generated because signification is *not a founding act, but*

*rather a regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects. In a sense, all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; ‘agency,’ then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition. (145)

The way in which Shakespeare’s Roman women use emulation and shame to break the stereotypes of the signified “virtuous Roman woman” is a form of agency that challenges the limited forms of repetitive acts accepted as the “recognizable standards of gender intelligibility” (16). Shakespeare’s Roman women tend to fall into one of two categories, effective and ineffective speakers, and the former group is the one that challenges the limits associated with their “female” signification. Evaluating these groups in the following two chapters allows us to compare and contrast not only the effectiveness of the rhetorical techniques discussed in this chapter but also the gendered rhetorical ethics of each woman’s speech.

## CHAPTER 2: THE ELUSIVE AUDIENCE AND FAILED APPEALS

As we established in chapter one, Shakespeare's Roman women rely upon the combination of a virtuous ethos, emulation, and shaming in order to be effective speakers, but using these techniques challenges the traditional ethics behind female speech. The women's rhetoric discussed in this chapter demonstrates the limitations of traditionally ethical rhetoric. This discussion will allow us to establish a baseline for ethical female rhetoric and its apparent predisposition to failure. Indeed, every woman in this chapter ultimately fails to persuade her audience. This failure results from a combination of factors: unskilled rhetoric, unchallenged ethics, misunderstood audiences, and unethical audiences.

Shakespeare's less persuasive female speakers make limited use of *ethos*, emulation, and shaming, relying instead on a stereotypically feminine rhetoric of *pathos*, by evoking fear, love, affection, or grief. In addition, they frequently misread their audience and thus ineffectively employ dissuasive or persuasive consequences. These are the failures demonstrated by Virgilia, Calpurnia, Octavia, and Lavinia; however, Lavinia and Lucrece face additional problems of audience and *ethos* that negate female speakers' most advantageous techniques. The unethical audience—a concept drawn from Crider's universal ethics—takes many different forms in the Roman works, but it marks an important, problematic point in the discussion of rhetorical failure: given an unethical audience, the female speaker is not necessarily “at fault” for failing to persuade, especially if her rhetoric and actions are ethical. Ultimately, these failures and the problems with unethical audiences are deeply rooted in restrictive definitions of ethical female performances and signification. Understanding this problematic foundation will

set the stage for the persuasive but ethically questionable rhetoric in the following chapter.

### **Soft Voices, Gentle Words**

Remarkably, none of Shakespeare's Roman works lack a skilled female speaker, but neither do they lack a weaker counterpart. Whether or not the stronger speakers are Roman—or even another woman—varies depending on the work; however, the weakest speakers are always stereotypically virtuous women. *Coriolanus*'s Virgilia, *Julius Caesar*'s Calpurnia, and *Antony and Cleopatra*'s Octavia are all examples of virtuous speakers who either lack rhetorical skill or the motivation to challenge the strict, traditional limits of women's ethical rhetoric. Given that their culture is prejudiced against women and female agency, it is understandable to ask if ethics is a moot point for women who are either too unskilled or naïve to transgress societal norms in the effort to persuade in the first place. I would argue that these women act in order to serve their civic duty through rhetoric, but societal limitations prevent them from actually achieving good ends: they cannot achieve persuasion without being unethical or transgressive.

The conflict between society and ethical rhetoric begins even before these women speak their first lines. Their habitual *ethos*, demonstrated by setting, stage direction, and other characters' testimony, speaks to virtues completely in line with traditional values and expectations. Virgilia, for all that she appears onstage throughout *Coriolanus*, speaks very little; in part, her silence stems from her role as the consummately virtuous wife for the first half of the play. In her first appearance, the stage directions note that she and Volumnia are sewing, (1.3.1), and Valeria—another noblewoman—remarks on the virtuous activity as well as the quality of the embroidery: "You are manifest

housekeepers. What are you sewing here? A fine spot, in good faith” (1.3.48-49). This establishes Virgilia’s habitual *ethos* based on discipline and industry. Her behavior and conversation in this scene further characterize her as chaste: Virgilia repeatedly insists on remaining indoors during her husband’s absence (1.3.67, 70-71). Interestingly, Shakespeare does not leave the value of such behavior unquestioned. Various characters mock Virgilia’s extreme obedience to the laws of decorum—she even refuses to visit a friend who is ill (1.3.72-77)—which is contextualized as a fault in this “ideal.” For example, Valeria claims that this show of chaste industry has little true value: “You would be another Penelope. Yet they say all of the yarn she spun in Ulysses’ absence did but fill Ithaca full of moths” (1.3.78-80). Even Coriolanus, upon returning from war, affectionately points out the extremity of his wife’s behavior: he calls her his “gracious silence” and asks why she weeps when she should celebrate (2.1.171-73). Most of what Virgilia says and does is simply an echo of her mother-in-law Volumnia. In the delegation to Coriolanus, her presence itself evokes *pathos* by virtue of her relationship with her husband and the affection he has for her; however, she presents herself solely as a supplicant, not as an advisor or rhetor. Her only persuasion derives from Volumnia’s: when Volumnia states that in war Coriolanus will “tread on [his] mother’s womb” (5.3.125), Virgilia simply adds, “Ay, and mine” (5.3.126). This failure to develop her own argument is a typical point of failure for female speech, and it is often accompanied by the *pathos* of grief or affection taking precedence over other forms of persuasion.

Overall, Virgilia’s virtuous *ethos* does not grant her rhetorical authority, because she seems a slave of virtue rather than its agent. Indeed, in 1.3 when she refuses to leave the house, she starts with the assertive “I will not” and then turns to “I cannot” or “I must



not” (1.3.67, 75, 103). This phrasing points to external restrictions that marginalize choice. In her acquiescent silence, Virgilia maintains social norms in respect to her own virtue—her own *honestum*, so to speak—but fails the needs of her country and people. In criticism, Virgilia is often ignored in favor of Volumnia, but her presence establishes an informative dichotomy: women in the play seem limited to either a virtuous life or a politically ambitious one, and both appear ultimately self-serving. This problematic relationship between virtue and agency reflects in her submissiveness to others even when she does speak, and it echoes in Octavia’s *ethos* and rhetoric as well.

Like Virgilia, Octavia is undeniably virtuous, and many characters in *Antony and Cleopatra* attest to her virtue. Agrippa sets her on a pedestal as a woman “[w]hose virtue and whose general graces speak / That which none else can utter” (2.2.136-7); however, her naiveté and ignorance undermine her attempts to persuade, despite her *ethos* as a chaste and pious woman doing her civic duty for husband, brother, and state. The uselessness of this “pure” Roman ideal becomes apparent in Octavia’s first appearance onstage, when she acquiesces to her arranged marriage with Antony. Octavia’s obedience is deeply bound to duty and affection for her brother, but her sense of piety overwhelms her as a character. For example, Antony says that his duties to the state will often require that he leave Rome, to which she replies, “All which time/ Before the gods my knee shall bow my prayers / To them for you” (2.3.2-4). Her words support Agrippa’s testimony of her virtue, but they are reminiscent of Virgilia’s lack of real agency. In fact, Octavia’s statement seems an effort to efface herself: there is no “I” in her statement, and the symbols of her piety—“my knee” and “my prayers”—are safely contained between Antony and the gods. She is, by testimony and action onstage, virtue incarnate, but the

real “Octavia” seems to disappear under the shadow of the female ideal. It is a virtue without authority.

Unfortunately, even a virtuous woman who tries to speak authoritatively has no guarantee that virtue is sufficient to support her *ethos*. For *Julius Caesar*’s Calpurnia, any habitual *ethos* she may have is overshadowed by her barrenness. Indeed, no one in the play speaks of her directly except Caesar, and there is no mention of whatever habitual *ethos* she might have. Her nearly non-existent *ethos* is undermined by Caesar’s public acknowledgment of her barrenness (1.2.11): she is wanting as a wife and as the symbolic center of the household because she cannot continue the family line. Her personal character is respectable, and Caesar does show her some affection, but her inability to bear children makes her, to a certain extent, a failure as a Roman woman and lessens her authority with Caesar. Lacking the added influence a woman might have as a mother to existing children—or even as a potential mother—she has less to draw upon for sympathy or authority with her husband. Calpurnia should therefore work harder to establish her *ethos* of virtue and goodwill, but her speech demonstrates the same tendency towards powerlessness and self-effacement that Virgilia and Octavia dramatize in both rhetoric and action.

In her brief debate with Caesar, Calpurnia tries to convince her husband of the danger he faces by using her *ethos* and *pathos* as a substitute for logical proof. Caesar deliberately interprets the omens and augurs’ readings as positive rather than negative, and he asserts his courage, constancy, and power to build his own *ethos* into that of a virtual immortal. In doing so, he attempts to shield himself from doubts and fears. In response, Calpurnia’s first argument is to focus on her own uncharacteristic fear, which,

contrary to expectation, is an intelligent move. Asserting a quality of her *ethos*, one Shakespeare takes from Plutarch, Calpurnia states that she “was never given to any fear or superstition” (Plutarch 1435). That she is not prone to superstition or the uncontrollable fears and emotions associated with the stereotypical “hysterical woman” gives her fears credibility; that Caesar obviously is prone to superstition gives her atypical fear more weight. Unfortunately, while her uncharacteristic fear should be persuasive, Caesar cannot let fear and superstition dictate his life because of their connection to womanliness, cowardice, and powerlessness. Essentially, Calpurnia’s attempt to build credibility and persuade by virtue of her *ethos* faces its first failure by misreading Caesar’s concerns: he is less worried about death than appearing cowardly. His self-concern also establishes Caesar as a potentially unethical auditor, focused more on his own *honestum* than the *utile*, the latter of which would risk some of his reputation to avoid the possible unrest his death would create.

Caesar’s wife maintains traditional ethics in her speech and manages with such tactics to persuade her husband; however, her adherence to gender roles and female virtue leave her persuasion vulnerable to Decius’s political appeals. Although her *ethos* gives her previously mentioned fear more credibility, it is still fear and a “womanly” emotion in Caesar’s more stoical perspective. Between these gender biases and Caesar’s self-imagined godhood, Calpurnia’s fear has little persuasive potential. In addition, because Calpurnia does not attempt to enhance her own *ethos*, her arguments have a contradictory effect by aggrandizing Caesar’s self-image, which is what keeps him from self-preservation in the first place. For example, when Caesar interprets the omens as ill tidings that could be meant for all or any in Rome, Calpurnia’s counters, “When beggars

die there are no comets seen; / The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes” (2.2.30-31). These lines flatter and warn simultaneously, but the flattery that omens such as these only come for “princes” unintentionally reinforces Caesar’s need to maintain the appearance of a great Roman man; therefore, staying home when the “heavens themselves blaze forth” only intensifies his association of self-preservation with cowardice.

Calpurnia does make a small attempt at shaming her husband out of his pride, but it falls solidly within the ethical bounds permitted to Castiglione’s courtier. Castiglione states that a courtier should speak honestly and boldly to steer a superior toward virtue (372-3), and Calpurnia speaks in just such a way when she admonishes Caesar for foolhardiness, saying, “Your wisdom is consumed in confidence” (2.2.49). Whether his confidence is real or merely a façade, Caesar seems to protest too much, trying to prove his courage and power by emphasizing his past opponents’ cowardice: he describes those who have threatened him in the past as cowards who “Ne’er looked but on my back” (2.2.11), and he claims his power was so great that the sight of his face alone was enough to vanquish them (2.2.11-12). For Caesar, then, acting for his own self-preservation is weakness. His relative disregard for safety falls perfectly in line with Aristotle’s definition of shame: “...shame is a mental picture of disgrace, in which we shrink from the disgrace itself and not from its consequences” (*On Rhetoric* 1384a). In this situation, Calpurnia’s deliberative focus must either overcome the fear of that disgrace in some way or take an epideictic turn that creates a more powerful shame. Unfortunately, she fails to do either. Her failure here matches what Jane Hiles refers to—specifically in *Titus Andronicus*, although it is also applicable here—as a failure to interpret appropriately the

situation and audience (233). This is, in fact, a failure of *ethos*: as stated previously, classical Greek orators acknowledged that understanding the audience's interests, desires, and responses is as much a part of *ethos* as characterization of the speaker and the speaker's opponent (Russell 87). Assuming that the threat of death is the best point of dissuasion, Calpurnia repeatedly appeals to Caesar's sense of self-preservation; however, avoiding the appellation of "coward" is a far stronger motivator for her husband (2.2.32-3). For this reason, her appeals fail to address adequately his fear of being branded a coward by his peers and therefore cannot dissuade him from going to the forum. So far, her means and ends are good, and yet they are also ineffective.

Calpurnia manages to overcome this problem of Caesar's almost suicidal *ethos*, but she does so at great cost to herself for very little gain. David Colclough argues that Caesar "is unpersuaded that the portents apply to him," and it is a "personal appeal" alone that convinces him to stay home (221-2). While Caesar's belief in the omens is debatable, it is indeed a personal plea that manages to persuade him; however, this personal appeal is not the clichéd "do it for me" or "do this for the sake of our love." Instead, Calpurnia tries to divert any shame that might fall on Caesar onto herself, offering Caesar to "[c]all it my fear / That keeps you in the house, and not your own" (*Julius Caesar* 2.2.50-1). In further support of this rhetorical turn, Calpurnia kneels in supplication: "Let me, upon my knee, prevail in this" (2.2.58). By kneeling, Calpurnia fully places the power in Caesar's hands as she hopes that the excuse and affection are strong enough to influence his decision. These lines epitomize Kahn's claim that Shakespeare's Roman men use women as "alibis" for their own weaknesses:

... [S]ome of Shakespeare's Roman women provide, in effect, an alibi for the heroes with whom they are paired—

in that, when impulses inimical to manly virtue are associated with women, such impulses can be disavowed. Or, when a woman provides the occasion for a division in the male subject—as Lucrece does for Tarquin, or Cleopatra for Antony, or Volumnia for Coriolanus—that division serves as grounds for tragic conflict and heroic status. (*Roman Shakespeare* 19)

In this case, Calpurnia offers herself as the alibi, thereby allowing Caesar to disavow both fear and the appearance of cowardice while maintaining his heroic reputation. In doing so, she resolves Caesar's internal conflict instead of creating it, and she does so at the cost of making herself appear more like Virgilia—lacking strength and constancy—and less like her true self; however, this act aligns ethically with the expectations for a dedicated wife. Unfortunately, this persuasion does not last: she cannot overcome her husband's ambition and foolhardiness with traditionally feminine rhetoric, no matter how ethical or virtuous it is.

Octavia similarly fails to redirect the ambitions of Antony, because she too bases her arguments on emotion. In Plutarch, Octavia is not only a woman of beauty and virtue, but also a fairly effective speaker. She appears well aware of the rivalry between her brother and husband, and she successfully negotiates peace between them when both were ready for war (Plutarch 1701-2). Eventually, their animosity overwhelms the truce, but for a time her rhetoric is quite effective in maintaining peace. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, her naïveté makes a mockery of her reputed rhetorical skill: her rhetoric is essentially pointless, and she acts as little more than her brother's and husband's pawn. In 3.4, she seemingly persuades Antony to let her treat for peace between him and Caesar, but the fact that Shakespeare starts the scene with Antony rebutting Octavia's off-stage argument suggests that there is no room for persuasion. Octavia's speech, however

beautifully worded and adorned with rhetorical devices, is nonetheless a *pathos*-laden plea that makes her argument as “weak” as Calpurnia’s is to Caesar. Indeed, Octavia bases her persuasion on the presumption that Antony cares more for her feelings than political rivalry:

O my good lord,  
Believe not all; or, if you must believe,  
Stomach not all. A more unhappy lady,  
If this division chance, ne'er stood between,  
Praying for both parts:  
The good gods will mock me presently,  
When I shall pray, 'O bless my lord and husband!'  
Undo that prayer, by crying out as loud  
'O, bless my brother!' Husband win, win brother  
Prays and destroys the prayer; no midway  
'Twixt these extremes at all. (3.4.10-20)

Octavia’s speech employs numerous rhetorical techniques and poetic devices, but they lack effectiveness. For example, the epanalepsis of “Believe not all; or, if you must believe, / Stomach not all” at the beginning of her plea should reinforce the fact that Antony has no reason to be bothered by perceived insults; however, it simply reinforces Antony’s propensity to believe what he wishes and reaffirms her powerlessness to convince him otherwise. Shakespeare grounds his version in Plutarch’s account, in which she successfully pleads with Caesar—a more sympathetic audience—to avoid war, and, while her speech employs fewer devices, it is more effective:

“For now,” said she, “every man’s eye doth gaze on me, that am the sister of one of the Emperors and the wife of the other. And if the worse counsel take place (which the gods forbid) and that they grow to wars, for yourselves it is uncertain to which of them two the gods have assigned the victory or overthrow. But for me, on which side soever victory fall, my state can be most miserable still.” (1701-2)

Plutarch's Octavia has the advantage of speaking to her brother's deep affection, but Shakespeare's speaks to Antony, who cares more for Cleopatra, his honor, and his rivalry with Caesar than the happiness of his Roman wife. Octavia's rhetorical devices rely entirely on creating *pathos*, but Antony has no great sympathy for her. Furthermore, Shakespeare's Octavia focuses almost entirely on her own emotional straits, embodying the negatively stereotypical female, who is overwhelmed by her emotions and focused more on helpless prayers than politics. In contrast, Plutarch's Octavia appears more reasonable and politically aware. For example, the plea of Shakespeare's Octavia frames the threat of uncertain victory only in terms of her prayers, while in Plutarch her only "prayer" is but a brief aside against the straightforward statement that either man could lose this undesirable war. Octavia's naiveté is no more apparent than in this moment, as she enthusiastically thanks Antony for granting her request to intercede with Caesar: "Thanks to my lord. / The Jove of power make me most weak, most weak, / Your reconciler!" (3.4.28-30). Although she means to be virtuous and humble in calling herself "most weak," Octavia speaks more truthfully of her rhetorical abilities than she realizes, all the while degrading her *ethos* as a capable intercessor. The line itself, with the added pause of repetition, makes her statement more likely to be received as an admission of weak rhetorical ability rather than a claim to humility. Given the errors she has already made, her following statement about the greater costs of war is too little, too late: her concern that "Wars 'twixt you twain would be / As if the world should cleave, and that slain men / Should solder up the rift" earns no clear response from her husband (3.4.30-32), and, indeed, there is no persuasive element to her statement. She cannot make a



successful argument without such persuasion, especially with an unethical auditor, for whom the *honestum* disregards the human lives his war will cost.

### **Unethical Audiences**

In truth, the problems for these women are as much a matter of unethical audiences as they are of unskilled persuasion. On the one hand, Calpurnia advises Julius Caesar for his own well-being, and yet Caesar's ambition and pride prevent him from weighing her arguments fairly. Virgilia ultimately does not speak enough on her own to warrant being deemed a rhetorician, but the very fact that her speech is so stunted by propriety testifies to the ethical issues in such restrictive gender performances. Octavia, on the other hand, is an ethical speaker; her motives are somewhat self-centered but not wholly without consideration for others or the greater good. Antony clearly fails to be ethical, misleading his wife and misrepresenting his desire for peace. Octavius Caesar's portrayal in the play is less clear-cut, but he too seems more focused on his personal ambition and *honestum* than the greater costs of his war with Antony. Because women cannot act as major players—as rivals for power or honor—they ultimately cannot redirect such impulses with traditional female rhetoric.

Virgilia, surprisingly, is the only one of these women to venture onto ethically questionable grounds. When she and Volumnia accost the tribunes in the street, they make a public display of their own grief and anger, all the while attempting to shame men whom they barely know. Here she arguably breaks the ethical restraints of speaking in public and speaking decorously, but her mere two lines of dialogue make her seem more of a facilitator for Volumnia's speech than a rhetor herself. As an accomplice, her means are questionable, but her ends are ethical, at least from her perspective: this spontaneous

epideictic diatribe testifies to Virgilia's and her mother-in-law's belief that Rome has abandoned order and propriety in its banishment of Coriolanus. As women, however, they lack true agency, and it is men who ultimately decide the propriety of their behavior. The tribunes call Volumnia "mad" (4.2.11, 47), and question her humanity (18), and the accusation extends by association to Virgilia. For these women to speak publically and with such *pathos* inscribes them as mad, "hysterical" women, incapable of rationality; this in turn negates the value of their speech, however justified it may be. Without the *ethos* of calm, respectable women speaking in an appropriately private venue, they cannot shame the tribunes, especially when the tribunes' role in Coriolanus's downfall makes the general's honor a moot point for emulation or shaming by comparison. By cultural standards, Volumnia and Virgilia's public displays of anger, grief, and irrationality only reinforce gender biases, but they have no other options. Without a public voice, they must resort to either "faint puling" in the streets or at home (4.2.55); Volumnia's "Juno-like" rage is just as impotent to change the course of events as the goddess herself was to influence Jupiter's infidelity (56). Even Menenius, the one man still in support of them, begs them to "be not so loud" when they accost the tribunes (4.2.14). He does say that they "have cause" to do so (4.2.52), but only after the tribunes have gone and he has begged the women for "peace" (4.2.31). Even then, he may only be so supportive for his own peace: his statement of "fie, fie, fie" after Volumnia and Virgilia's exit could be directed at the women and their behavior rather than the tribunes (4.2.56). The women's speech may be ethically justified, but its means still sit uncomfortably with the ethics of appropriate female behavior; unfortunately, the men who decide whether or not that speech is appropriate simply choose to write the women off.

The ease with which men walk away from traditional female rhetoric is apparent in all of these women's plotlines. For example, by the time she makes her last appearance, it is clear that Octavia's words are worth less to her husband and brother than her significance as a married woman, a role in which she serves as the men's pretext for both peace and war. The erasure of her words, replaced by her role, is made all the more obvious when her brother rejects her peace mission out of hand, and she makes no effort to persuade him after learning of Antony's betrayal. Instead, she simply calls herself "most wretched / That have my heart parted betwixt two friends" (*Antony and Cleopatra* 3.6.76-78). Ultimately, Octavia's "negotiation" plays out as a naïve series of questions and exclamations in response to Caesar's accusations against Antony. Upon realizing the truth of these claims, she abandons her mission for peace and retires as a virtuous and "abused" woman (3.6.86). Indeed, her final "Is it so?" marks a pitiful closure to her part in the play (3.6.96).

Similarly, Calpurnia finds her arguments overwritten by her husband and Decius Brutus, who demonstrate the problems of unethical audiences and speakers, respectively. Initially, Calpurnia takes on an advisor's role, and Caesar allows it, seemingly without trouble or prejudice. In fact, Shakespeare makes a notable change from Plutarch in that it is Calpurnia, not the augurs, who ultimately persuades Caesar to stay home; this makes the eventual overturning of her rhetoric all the more significant. Caesar may start out as an ethical auditor, but his pride prevents him from giving Calpurnia's arguments due consideration; worse, he easily falls prey to flattery, one of the key tools of an unethical speaker. David Colclough notes the irony in Decius Brutus's reversal of her persuasion: "The one striking instance of honest counsel in this part of the play is, interestingly,

delivered by a woman—but even that is fatally undermined by its source, its context, Caesar’s pride and susceptibility to flattery, and by an expert piece of reinterpretation” (221). Given Calpurnia’s weak argument and sacrifice of her own *ethos*, Decius Brutus finds it all too easy to manipulate Caesar’s unethical self-interest. Decius reinterprets the images of her dream in a way that flatters Caesar’s sense of self-worth, and he speaks of clear benefits and downsides that outweigh Calpurnia’s affection, superstitions, and excuse. Decius also identifies her excuse as political suicide, especially because it stems from superstition and a woman’s fear (*Julius Caesar* 2.2.96-99), the latter of which is itself a source of shame (Colclough 222). In addition, he reinterprets Calpurnia’s dream as a good omen and supports his interpretation with false news of the Senate’s intent to crown Caesar. Decius flatters, shames, and provides credible evidence to support his claims, and as a peer—and Caesar’s heir (Plutarch 1436)—he has a considerable *ethos* to support his claims, unlike Calpurnia; worse, he undermines what little *ethos* she still has by belittling her fears and blatantly re-characterizing her as foolish, mockingly stating that they should “Break up the Senate till another time, / When Caesar’s wife shall meet with better dreams” (*Julius Caesar* 2.2.98-99). Unlike Calpurnia’s argument, which simply promised affection and low-investment consequences, Decius’s offers high-investment consequences with clear advantages and disadvantages, but he does so with both unethical means and ends. Now, she becomes not just Caesar’s alibi but the new source of his shame. In fact, her attempt to be humble and ethical backfires so fully that she becomes the source of shame, rather than Caesar’s pride: “How foolish do your fears seem now, Calpurnia! / I am ashamed I did yield to them” (2.2.105-6). Caesar lays the true shame at her feet, eradicating what little *ethos* she might have still held.

These cases demonstrate that women's rhetoric, so long as it remains confined by the limitations of traditional female norms, easily falls aside in the face of a male auditor's ambitions. Calpurnia, the only one of these women who achieves real persuasion, even temporarily, shows the potential for speech that addresses the *ethos* of both speaker and auditor, but the combined misreading of the audience and careful adherence to gender norms weaken her rhetoric. Although the unethical attitudes of the auditors are not the speakers' fault, the limited tactics of *pathos* and a mere reputation for virtue are not enough to drive persuasive rhetoric or achieve lasting persuasion over unethical audiences.

### **Handicapped Speakers and Deadly Audiences**

In contrast to Octavia, Calpurnia, and Virgilia, Lavinia and Lucrece face an entirely different level of obstruction to their rhetorical ends. Any auditor who fails to give due consideration to a speaker is ethically compromised, but audiences who mean deliberate harm to the speaker bring that ethical conflict to a new level. Although a virtuous *ethos* should be a benefit to a speaker—even if she has trouble using it effectively—it is actually a hindrance for Lavinia and Lucrece. This paradoxical reversal stems from audience hostility. In both *Titus Andronicus* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, the women's audiences target female virtue in order to harm male rivals, and thus the women's virtue actually decreases their rhetorical effectiveness. To some extent, we might argue the same is true for Antony and Octavia, because Antony seems to find little interest in a virtuous woman and may or may not care for Octavia's well-being. She is a pawn in his rivalry with Caesar, just as Lucrece and Lavinia are between the Goths and Titus, and Tarquin and Collatine, respectively. The difference is ultimately one of

unconcern versus outright hostility, and while Octavia's virtue may not provide a rhetorical advantage, neither is it an inherent weakness for her argument. For Lavinia and Lucrece, however, the use of a virtuous *ethos* becomes a distinct rhetorical disadvantage. Their auditors' motivations are rooted in a desire to defile that *ethos*, and, therefore, emphasizing that *ethos* actually increases the auditors' nefarious motivation.

This hostility towards the virtuous *ethos* effectively handicaps Lucrece and Lavinia as female speakers, and the hostility directed toward the speakers themselves creates a divide between the interests of speaker and audience that in turn inhibits the speaker's use of dissuasive consequences. Hostile audiences are a universal problem for male and female speakers alike: in *Titus Andronicus*, Saturninus only grants Titus's plea for mercy in the first scene because Tamora convinces him to defer a small revenge for a greater one. In this case, too, Titus's reputation likely works against him as Saturninus's rival and Rome's favorite for the imperial throne. The primary difference between this moment and other situations where men face hostile audiences is that lust and the destruction of chastity—a woman's worth—is not the aim for a man's hostile audience. Essentially, Lavinia and Lucrece are treated as possessions or symbols rather than people, and the actions against them are meant to destroy their cultural "value" to their male family members. Under these circumstances, a woman's argument—already disadvantaged by cultural prejudice against female speakers—confronts an insurmountable obstacle; however, the techniques of the women's speech in the face of such implacable, unethical audiences highlights the parts of their rhetoric that—in a more favorable context—should work, and this situation is particularly informative for

understanding the intersections of gendered performance, ethics, and rhetoric within Shakespeare's Rome.

In *Titus Andronicus*, Lavinia faces the challenge of a hostile audience, along with the disadvantage that this audience does not share her Roman values. No faction in *Titus Andronicus* remains untarnished by vice or pride, but, where the Romans are driven by the twisted versions of *honestum* and *romanitas*, the Goths are driven by lust, pride, and, in Aaron's case, villainy. They seek revenge rather than justice, and, therefore, any pleas based on honor, mercy, or virtue fall on deaf ears. In addition, Lavinia's audience is motivated to do her harm specifically: she is a witness to Tamora's adultery, a vulnerable target to attack Titus's family and honor, and the object of Chiron and Demetrius's lust. Even in more favorable circumstances, Lucrece's rhetorical missteps would prevent her from coming anywhere close to success, but her failures manifest just how vulnerable female persuasion is to the rhetorical situation.

Lucrece's encounter with Tarquin is both like and unlike Lavinia's encounter with the Goths. *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Titus Andronicus* were written around the same time, and Lavinia's story was clearly inspired by Lucrece's legend as much as that of Ovid's Philomela. Thus Lavinia provides an excellent point of comparison and contrast for Lucrece and vice versa. The biggest difference is that Lucrece is a much more effective rhetorician, despite her failure to persuade Tarquin. True, she does commit many of the same errors as the preceding women, but she manages the challenge of facing a hostile audience much better than Lavinia: indeed, she arguably overcomes it, or nearly so. She also addresses the paradox of a virtuous ethos more successfully than Lavinia. For both women, the virtuous female *ethos* is their attackers' primary target and thus more of a

rhetorical weakness than a strength, but where Lavinia cannot reframe herself, Lucrece does. Ultimately, however, both women's rhetoric fails to dissuade their audiences, and as Weaver points out, "The silent Lavinia and the hyperarticulate Lucrece have opposite extremes of rhetorical facility at their disposal, but the ineffectiveness of conventional narration [of a bodily violation] is evident in both cases" (448). Although Weaver refers to their communication after their respective rapes, the conventions of gendered signification and rhetoric are a problem beforehand as well.

Each woman's *ethos* becomes the target of her opponent(s) precisely because her virtue is so remarkable. *The Rape of Lucrece's* early descriptions of Lucrece primarily focus on the physical evidence of virtue, Lucrece's beauty. This is a common trope of Renaissance poetry that echoes Petrarchan tradition and the popular belief that beauty was proof of inner virtue (Keeble 54). Four successive stanzas expound on this concept, exemplified in such lines as "This heraldry in Lucrece' face was seen, / Argued by beauty's red and virtue's white" (*The Rape of Lucrece* 64-5). Over the course of the poem, Lucrece also proves herself the epitome of female virtue. According to Carter,

Lucrece's primary metaphorical function is to signify chastity, or provide an historical example of such, and her name is used heavily. In addition, Lucrece's status as a wife is crucial. Her dedication to her home (Lucrece is never presented, in either sources or representations, out of her house), housewifely duties, and husband's honour illustrate a model Roman woman, and she is held up in the sixteenth century as possessing the qualities of a desirable wife. (55)

As a paragon across centuries, Lucrece retains a symbolic power, and Tarquin's ability to destroy her virtue is thus an assertion of power within a society that judges a woman's—and by extension her husband's—worth and honor by her chastity.



Lavinia becomes a target for exactly the same reason: her virtue makes her sexually desirable, and her symbolic value to her family makes her and her reputation targets for revenge. Even Aaron testifies to her virtue, saying that “Lucrece was not more chaste / Than this Lavinia” (*Titus Andronicus* 2.1.109-10), and he quickly follows with the statement that Chiron and Demetrius may need to slake their lust “by force” (2.1.119). Again, the societal norms in the play grant this action power to destroy the honor of the woman and her family, making the virtuous *ethos* a target for animosity in *Titus Andronicus* as well as *The Rape of Lucrece*. Indeed, Titus’s reference to the story of Verginius “supplies a historical context in which chastity has a fully developed political significance” in the play (Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare* 72).

That significance is what makes Lavinia and her virtue prime targets for revenge. Chiron and Demetrius state that, simply because she is a woman, she must “be loved” and “wooed” (*Titus Andronicus* 2.1.84, 82). Just as she is the grammatically passive object there—featureless but for her female sex—she becomes the object, the pawn, on which and through which Tamora and her sons can achieve their vengeance. Her rape and disfigurement will make her a passive, constantly visible object of shame for her father, because “chastity is as much about public—that is political—reputation as personal virtue” (Smith 23-24). Lavinia is thus a symbol of family honor; as the victim of rape and mutilation, she signifies the family’s dishonor through the loss of posterity and Titus’s inability to defend or avenge the wrongs done against his house (Kahn 49). Her naïveté in regard to the Goths’ motives is apparent when she pleads for mercy for her father’s sake (Asp 339). For a Roman audience, Titus’s reputation and Lavinia’s *ethos* as his daughter would carry weight, but Tamora and her sons are non-Roman enemies, even if they

publically pretend otherwise. To believe her father's reputation has universal appeal seems a bias of Roman "privilege" on Lavinia's part. Her greater error, however, is ignoring the death of Tamora's eldest son and speaking instead of Titus sparing Tamora's life as mercy. Tamora's investment in Lavinia's rape originates in large part from revenge for Alarbus, whom the Andronici killed in adherence to *romanitas* (2.3.161-7), and attacking Lavinia's virtue strikes at the heart of that honor. Rather than assuaging Tamora's anger, Lavinia's references to her father and her own virtues rub salt in the wound. Indeed, Demetrius describes Lavinia's chastity as a personal offence to the family, saying, "This minion stood upon her chastity, / Upon her nuptial vow, her loyalty [...] / And shall she carry this unto her grave?" (2.3.124-7). Invoking her father's name simply reminds her adversaries of her usefulness as an object for revenge. In other words, Lavinia's appeals based on her *ethos*—and her father's—actually encourage the villainy of this hostile audience.

The problems of the virtuous *ethos* are compounded all the more by the association of women's public speech with sexual license. Although such associations may harm the virtuous *ethos*, they simultaneously act as a perceived invitation, which sickeningly unravels the women's attempts to protect their virtue. Lavinia's speech falls doubly into this trap, first when she attacks Tamora's virtue with crude jibes and later when she unwittingly loads her speech with double entendres. Lavinia lessens her own *ethos* with the coarse language and insults she uses at her entrance to the scene: Barbara Antonucci states that "Lavinia was quite capable of fierce assertions, assertions that a 'properly' chaste woman would not have pronounced if not blushing" (126). In other words, she configures herself as the contradictory chaste "trull" whom Tamora later

instructs her sons to “deflower” (*Titus Andronicus* 2.3.191). At the same time, she also inspires Tamora’s animosity and advertises her own potential threat as an informant of Tamora’s adultery. Then, after the tables have turned, her language and imagery at the end of her plea illustrate the potential rape even as they try to avert it:

The present death I beg, and one thing more  
That womanhood denies my tongue to tell.  
O, keep me from their worse-than-killing lust,  
And tumble me into some loathsome pit  
Where never man’s eye may behold my body. (2.3.173-7)

The modesty that prevents her from speaking directly about her chastity results in euphemisms that summon images of sex even as they attempt reference to a modest and merciful death. For example, the “pit” she mentions recalls euphemisms for rape and female genitalia.<sup>15</sup> As Carolyn Asp states, this is just one more case where Lavinia “miscalculates the nature of her audience” (339). Not only does Lavinia misread her audience’s potential for mercy but also her unconscious pun on “tumble” “ironically prophesies the circumstances of her later violation” and perhaps further encourages her enemies’ intentions (Tricomi 236).

Lavinia’s use of unintentionally sexual images dramatizes hypocritical attitudes toward female speech. As we’ve stated before, women’s speech was often considered a sign of sexual vice. Sarah Carter explains this complex interplay between speech as promiscuity and speech as defense, saying, “Lavinia’s eloquence is potentially problematic, given the association of vocal and sexual openness....However, we can read Lavinia’s rape as a *failure* of her eloquence, as evidence of a chaste woman appropriately unskilled in verbal persuasion, rather than an inevitable consequence of being

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<sup>15</sup> See also Frederick 212-3; Kahn, *Shakespeare’s Rome* 53-4; and Leggatt 40.

linguistically proactive” (27). In other words, when speaking at all would have been considered a sort of complicity—equivalent to today’s sexist accusation of “asking for it,” which has impeded bringing rapists to justice throughout history—Lavinia’s rhetorical failures are actually a sign of her virtue and naïveté. She cannot argue against the Goths and cannot recognize her own double-entendres because she is too virtuous. Although her earlier sexual punning about Tamora’s adultery might seem to contradict this reading of her virtue, Kahn states that the meaning of her insults “implies her own unspotted chastity” in comparison to Tamora’s adulterousness (*Roman Shakespeare* 53). In other words, Lavinia’s ineffective rhetoric confirms her innocence and ethical intent.

Surprisingly, the problem of sexual innuendo and defensive speech appears in some of Lucrece’s language as well, although it is far less pronounced. Lucrece states that she is a “weakling” (*The Rape of Lucrece* 584), and her only weapons against Tarquin are “moans” (587), “sighs” (586, 588), “tears,” and “groans” (588): indeed, it is her “sighs like whirlwinds” that “labour hence to heave” Tarquin away from her (586). Tarquin has threatened that any resistance will be answered with death and public shaming (513-25), and thus Lucrece must walk a fine line to argue in her defense. Her word choice here, depending on interpretation, can be either beneficial or damaging to her argument for a number of reasons. In using words like “sighs” and “moans,” Lucrece attempts to emphasize her emotional pain. Kerrigan notes the fine line between *pathos* and the unsympathetic “hystericized” woman, a line that Lucrece seems to navigate well. In this situation, her sighs and moans are “unignorable yet unable to insist” (Kerrigan 56): Tarquin cannot ignore them, yet they will not count as punishable resistance. Given this reading, her decision seems effective, because Tarquin does allow her to argue for

almost the same number of lines that he uses in his debate with himself, and Kahn notes that Lucrece's speech becomes "twelve stanzas of passionate argument" (*Roman Shakespeare* 37). These words also, anachronistically, recall the tradition of the female complaint. This, in turn, clearly characterizes the imminent rape as an abuse of power akin to those commonly described in complaints. The similarity also indicates that the violation has already begun, just in Tarquin's invasion of her room and his threats against her virtue; thus, her complaint does have some potential to shame her auditor. Despite the persuasive and situational aptness of Lucrece's word choice, "sighs" and "moans"—along with words like "be movèd," "heave" and "labor"—also have unintended sexual connotations (*The Rape of Lucrece* 586), much like Lavinia's choice of "tumble" and "pit" (*Titus Andronicus* 2.3.176). This continues in the isocolon and epistrophe of the first four lines early in her plea:

My husband is thy friend; for his sake spare me.  
Thyself art mighty; for thine own sake leave me;  
Myself a weakling; do not then ensnare me.  
Thou look'st not like deceit; do not deceive me. (*The Rape of Lucrece*  
582-5),

Because each line concludes with a focus on Lucrece herself and ends grammatically with "me," Lucrece positions herself as the direct object of the action. In other words, the emphasis continually comes back to her as a female body subject to Tarquin's will, and it repeatedly draws Tarquin's attention to her and his desire for her.

Against such horrific threats and unethical auditors, Lucrece's and Lavinia's rhetoric has little chance for success; however, Lucrece potentially comes quite close to rhetorical success, while Lavinia struggles and flounders repeatedly. The key point in their varying levels of rhetorical success is centered in the understanding of their

audiences, the other half of *ethos*. Lucrece manages to appeal effectively to many of Tarquin's conflicting emotions, but Lavinia fails to find or manipulate such conflicts in her audience. Although Lavinia faces the added challenge of self-assured aggressors, she also fails to construct a consistent audience or argument in her attempt to weaken that self-assurance. Jane Hiles identifies Lavinia's repeated misreadings of the situation and inappropriate responses as "ineptness" (243). Whether or not this ineptness is her natural inability or a mix of inexperience and panic, Lavinia does indeed fail miserably in a number of ways.

Lavinia's inability to settle on her audience divides her attempts to invoke *pathos*; it also reduces her ability to convince Tamora or her sons to emulate virtues of pity or mercy. In anger, she addresses Tamora first, calling her "barbarous" in response to Bassianus's murder and the empress's incendiary lies. Tamora is ready to kill her in mutual contempt at this point, but Chiron and Demetrius argue their plan to rape Lavinia first. When Tamora accedes to this plan—on condition that they kill Lavinia afterwards—Lavinia's approach to the situation suddenly changes. She begins a plea with the abruptly ended "O Tamora, thou bearest a woman's face—" (*Titus Andronicus* 2.3.136), which may be an ironic, ambiguous statement about the mismatch of character and appearances (Asp 339). Regardless of why the address goes unfinished, Lavinia already demonstrates a failure to employ *ethos* and emulation. Rather than try again, Lavinia seemingly gives up on Tamora, instead pleading with Chiron and Demetrius to intercede with their mother. Unfortunately, what she fails to realize—or ignores—is that Chiron and Demetrius, in addition to their lust, seem to share the same level of contempt for her as their mother. This misreading is baffling because neither son has reason or

incentive to be merciful. Demetrius's response to her plea is indicative of the Goth family's resolution against their victim: he does "intercede," but only to say that it will be Tamora's "glory" to hear Lavinia's plea without sympathizing (2.3.139-41).

Even focusing on the sons, Lavinia seems unable to treat them as a single audience or consider either man's interests in the situation. As she finally begins her plea in earnest, she reveals not only those failings but also an uncertain command of rhetorical genre and her mishandling of shared values:

When did the tiger's young ones teach the dam?  
O, do not learn her wrath; she taught it thee.  
The milk though suck'st from her did turn to marble.  
Even at thy teat thou hadst thy tyranny.  
Yet every mother breeds not sons alike.  
[To Chiron] Do thou entreat her to show a woman's pity.  
(*Titus Andronicus* 2.3.143-7)

In the first four lines, Lavinia attempts to shame Demetrius for "wrath" and "tyranny" while characterizing mother and son as savage animals (2.3.125-7). This shaming ignores the importance of family bonds to her audience and relies solely on Lavinia's value system. It is insulting to both the sons' characters and to Tamora's mothering, and the metaphor of tigers firmly establishes herself as a potential victim of merciless predators. The motif of Tamora and her sons as tigers contradicts Lavinia's appeals to Tamora as a "woman," capable of pity (2.3.147). Contradictions mar her logic, as well. For example, she asks that Chiron and Demetrius "do not learn [Tamora's] wrath" (2.3.144), but immediately states that they have already learned and metaphorically fed upon it. Even her one use of alliteration and consonance reinforces this contradiction: the soft "th" and familiar tone of "thee," "thy," and "thou" contrast with the animal cruelty emphasized by the hard "t" in "teat...hadst...tyranny," in words that assert the sons' inherited brutality.

Lavinia is creative and has ample powers of rhetorical invention, but she fails to use them effectively: the metaphor of milk as marble, although creative, lacks clear meaning, falling into what Mary Fawcett describes as the Andronici's typical style of speech, "puzzled, truncated, and oblique" (271). Indeed, *asyndeton* in this particular plea removes whatever logical progression may exist between the disparate images Lavinia invokes and thus reinforces Demetrius and Chiron's parentage despite intending to break that link. The logical disjunction in these odd metaphors and un-contextualized shaming is nowhere more apparent than in her final lines of this segment and Chiron's reply. The tiger metaphor necessarily configures Chiron and Demetrius as cold and cruel like their mother, yet "every mother breeds not sons alike" tries to abandon that logic while maintaining the metaphor with "breeds" (146). Chiron points out this contradiction in his response: "What, wouldst thou have me prove myself a bastard?" Lavinia's argument offers him nothing to replace his familial bonds nor any benefit to abandoning them, aside from a tacit claim that such action is the moral thing to do. What is moral for Lavinia, however, has little to no bearing with her auditor.

Lucrece similarly misreads the depth of her auditor's antagonism and falls into paradoxically harmful metaphor. Compared to Lavinia's, Lucrece's skills are more apparent in her delivery and the artistry of her language, as the narrator attests:

Her modest eloquence with sighs is mixed,  
Which to her oratory adds more grace.  
She puts the period often from his place,  
And midst the sentence so her accent breaks  
That twice she doth begin ere once she speaks.  
(*The Rape of Lucrece* 563-7)

These techniques were commonly regarded as excellent tools for persuasion when used appropriately, and Lucrece's artfulness here only continues to grow throughout her



speech. She begins her plea with a fascinating sequence of maxims that metaphorically echo her virtues as a woman and hostess. She speaks of her “hospitality” and refers to herself as the “fountain that gave drink to thee” and a “poor unseasonable doe” (575, 577, 581). These phrases emphasize her graciousness, kindness, and innocence while using the logic of the maxim to advise Tarquin against breaking social rules. She also attempts to shame him, stating, “He is no woodman that doth bend his bow / To strike a poor unseasonable doe” (580-1). Although her logic dictates that he should be ashamed for ungentlemanly behavior against a helpless and married woman, her logic does not take into account the emulative rivalry between Tarquin and her husband Collatine (Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare* 30). Lucrece is unaware of her actual “seasonable” status in this context and inadvertently objectifies herself as an animal to be hunted. Even more unfortunate, Lucrece does not fully connect these maxims into a complete enthymematic or syllogistic structure, and they therefore read like a frantic list that cannot focus on a specific behavior to correct; thus, while she speaks more eloquently than Lavinia, Lucrece also makes errors in reading her audience—appealing to her *ethos* when doing so is actually harmful and failing to construct a fully coherent, logical argument—but this failure similarly testifies to her innocence and purity.

Unable to use their own virtue to inspire emulation in their audiences, Lavinia and Lucrece turn to other methods of employing emulation, with varying degrees of success. Although Lavinia fails to convince Chiron or Demetrius not to emulate their mother, she continues to offer them examples of behavior they *should* emulate. Unfortunately, she does so without offering any clear advantage to such behavior. She acknowledges the fault in her previous reasoning—that acting against their mother would be equivalent to

the sons' declaring themselves metaphorical bastards because "'Tis true, the raven doth not hatch a lark" (Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus* 2.3.149)—and turns instead to fables and anecdotes of predatory animals acting with pity, contrary to their nature. Her two examples, the lion willingly declawed and the raven caring for orphaned hatchlings (2.3.151-4), are topically apt, but they lack both context and clear benefit: she simply states the acts of pity themselves, omitting any solid reason or advantage for her audience to have their "paws pared" or to "foster forlorn children" (2.3.152-3). As rhetorical paradigms, the examples lack the critical features necessary to be anything more than unreasonable *pathos* while, as Miola notes, insisting on the connection between the Goths and carnivorous or scavenging beasts (205). For an ethical audience sharing Lavinia's cultural values, the appeal to selflessness and the good of others might be persuasive on its own, but it is lost on people who do not share her cultural or educational background. Indeed, Tamora's remark "I know not what it means" proves the incoherency of Lavinia's plea (2.3.157). Even if the barriers between Roman and Gothic culture are blurred by the play—with the Goths demonstrating varying command of the "language of the empire" (Antonucci 120-1)—these unfamiliar fables prove that any shared cultural knowledge or values are superficial or coincidental. In the end, Lavinia's failure to use emulation effectively is directly related to this lack of shared cultural values. She claims that Tamora is not to be emulated and implicitly states that her own character and values are to be emulated instead; however, Lavinia is sadly lacking as a figure worthy of emulation. She may indeed be virtuous, but she continually reinforces the image of herself as a pitiful victim, one who in no way inspires emulation in these "tigers."

The second stanza of Lucrece's plea also includes a problematic emphasis on herself as a helpless victim, but she begins to demonstrate an alternative use for emulation that could work for her situation. The same lines that put a troublesome emphasis on her body also attempt to create an ideal *ethos* for Tarquin through an enthymematic argument, listing reasons for Tarquin to desist while leaving the consequences—should he not heed her warnings—up to his inference:

My husband is thy friend; for his sake spare me.  
Thyself art mighty; for thine own sake leave me.  
Myself a weakling; do not then ensnare me.  
Thou look'st not like deceit; do not deceive me.  
(*The Rape of Lucrece* 582-5)

These are, however, the very arguments Tarquin has already held with himself (190-280), having reasoned through and accepted the shame and consequences of raping her (351-7). Still, Lucrece articulates the man Tarquin should be, and the inference in the final line is that looking to deceive her (9)—seeking to harm her, contrary to his position and appearance—is a betrayal of his identity, a loss of self and honor. Although these lines may seem to hinder Lucrece's cause by focusing on herself and her weakness, they also attempt to reverse Tarquin's attack on her *ethos*. From the start, Tarquin engages in victim blaming, attempting to reframe his motives as Lucrece's responsibility: by perfectly performing the role her gender dictates (482-5), she ignites his "will" (495), or uncontrollable desire. From this perspective, both her body and her character work against her in dissuading Tarquin; however, by emphasizing her innocence and even her weakness in contrast with his power and responsibility on each line, she reflects the agency and responsibility for Tarquin's actions back on him. This tactic does not save Lucrece from the double-bind of Tarquin's threat, but it does grant her more flexibility to

shame him by forcing him to reconsider the ethics of his actions and his ethical responsibility as an auditor to her plea.

Lavinia, unfortunately, cannot reach this level of rhetoric: between her misreading of the audience and poor attempts at emulation, her speech is doomed to fail. These problems are encapsulated by her final spoken words. Lavinia's earlier arguments imply some shame for Tamora's "bestial" nature, but she does not pursue shaming as a distinct tactic until the end, when all hope is lost. At first, she pleads for Tamora to be a "charitable murderer" and kill her with her purity intact (2.3.178). This oxymoron encapsulates the inherent conflict of values and motives between Lavinia and her Goth adversaries, as well the paradoxical nature of such speech. On the one hand, Lavinia's argument tries to emphasize the need for an appearance of virtue: for example, she does not say that granting a merciful death will *make* Tamora a merciful person, but at least the empress will "be called a gentle queen" (2.3.168). On the other hand, the phrase implicitly shames Tamora for having such low potential for admirable virtues. When even this small mercy is denied, Lavinia turns to outright shaming, fully equating Tamora with savage beasts: "No grace, no womanhood—ah, beastly creature, / The blot and enemy to our general name" (2.3.182-3). Lavinia denies Tamora's nature as a woman and, then, her very humanity. In doing so, she finally acknowledges the difference between herself and the Goth queen, not as a metaphor but as an actuality. Against such an unethical audience, who will not even consider goodwill toward the speaker, Lavinia's harsh words are an even more justified version of Volumnia and Virgilia's attack on the tribunes. Ethical speech and tactics have no potential for success in this situation, and virtually any other form of agency would be equally doomed; however, Lavinia's

problems with *ethos*, agency, and rhetoric are exacerbated by the cultural restrictions and significations associated with women in Roman society.

Where Lavinia struggles and fails to use *ethos* and shaming effectively, Lucrece has greater success, despite her rhetorical handicap. After turning the focus of her rhetoric away from herself and onto Tarquin, she employs more *ethos*- and *logos*-centric rhetoric focused on deliberative consequences and epideictic shaming. In doing so, she abandons the role of the victim, adopting the role of Castiglione's courtier who attempts to guide his prince away from vice. Lucrece now concentrates on Tarquin victimizing himself and Rome. Because his twisted *honestum* and *romanitas* motivate his actions, Lucrece can employ shame more effectively by comparing his errant self with the ideal to which he aspires.

Lucrece contrasts Tarquin's reputation and his current behavior, thereby disassociating him from his identity as well as his self-control. Remarking on the difference between who he appears to be and how he behaves, she says, "Hast thou put on [Tarquin's] shape to do him shame?" and "Thou art not what thou seem'st" (*The Rape of Lucrece* 597, 600). Her goal is to attack Tarquin's self-identification as a great Roman man: in her words, the man before her is no longer Tarquin at all but rather someone else taking his form for evil purposes. Even if he is still Tarquin, his actions run contrary to the honor and just power of "a god, a king" that he desires to be (600). Lucrece's words separate Tarquin from the ideal he should be, and they reject his power and political status. Because he cannot control his desires or conduct himself appropriately, he does not deserve the powers of a prince or king, because "kings like gods should govern everything" (602). Tarquin already acknowledges that his course of action runs contrary

to what is honorable and just, even for a king (197-203), and so her words play upon his internal conflict while shaming him for the inability to “govern everything,” namely his own desires. Either he is a great man and therefore can control himself, or he is a base man and incapable of self-control. Although Lucrece merely provides a venue and voice for Tarquin’s “tragic conflict and heroic status” (Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare* 19), she refuses to provide an alibi for his undesirable behaviors and traits. Tactically, then, this claim pits Tarquin’s identity against his sexual desire and ambition in such a way that undermines his justifications and negates his identification as a member of the ruling family and worthy rival in male emulation.

The ethics of Lucrece’s speech and shaming appears in her concern for Tarquin’s well-being as well as the good of Rome. She speaks of his shame as an everlasting consequence, one that will corrupt both his rule and his people (*The Rape of Lucrece* 603-23). Where Tarquin simply fails to see the consequences of his actions beyond the shame he and his children may face (204-10), Lucrece projects the effects his crime could have for all of Rome. Indeed, Lucrece sees Tarquin’s vice and corruption in this moment as a first step downward for not only him, but all of Rome, and the force of her *logos* prevents her claim from becoming the fallacy of the slippery slope. “What,” she asks, “dar’st thou not when once thou art a king?” (606), predicting that such corruption cannot limit itself to a single crime. One crime will lead to others, not only in himself but also in his people, because “princes are the glass, the school, the book / Where subjects’ eyes do learn, do read, do look” (615-16). Her rhetorical focus is not on herself or even her husband’s honor but the honor and peace of all Rome: her focus is the *utile*, that which is useful--the greater good.

It is in this ripple effect on his subjects that Lucrece makes her unique argument for emulation: she contrasts the images of the ideal king and the wicked one within the implied Renaissance metaphor of the kingdom as a body, with the king—the head—serving as both a ruler and an example of ideal behavior to his people. Tarquin, then, sets a bad example that his people will emulate. This claim creates a strong dissuasive consequence in her deliberative rhetoric, and it draws Tarquin’s shame into the public sphere: as Fernie states, quoting from Cicero’s *De Inventione*, “for Cicero, a prescribed author for Elizabethans, the emphasis [on shame] is similarly public: shame is ‘the sense of ...decency which secures observance and firm authority for what is honourable’ ” (25). By moving Tarquin’s shame beyond the limits of her bedroom and his immediate family, she creates a potentially more tangible form of shame with greater power to restore Tarquin to decency. Tarquin wrongly sees himself as able to return to his current identity and reputation, because he has already attempted to disassociate from himself in the moment of his crime. Heather Dubrow, drawing on Tarquin’s claim that “My part is youth, and beats these from the stage” (278), says that “[i]f one is an actor, then one is adopting a persona rather than behaving normally: thus his metaphor offers Tarquin a way to distance himself from his crime, while at the same time proleptically hinting to the audience of the real loss of identity that that crime will generate” (407). Lucrece attempts to overcome this logic by making Tarquin into his own audience:

Think but how vile a spectacle it were  
To view thy present trespass in another.  
Men’s faults do seldom to themselves appear;  
Their own transgressions partially they smother.  
This guilt would seem death-worthy in thy brother.  
    O, how are they wrapped in with infamies  
    That from their own misdeeds askance their eyes!  
(631-7)

Lucrece's argument attempts to make Tarquin's shame "visible" to himself while directly shaming him for avoiding his culpability. With this enhanced shame, as well as the threat of a disordered kingdom corrupted by its ruler's example, Lucrece's argument demonstrates how he should emulate the ideal of his station rather than lower himself through the faulty emulation in which he is currently engaged.

Lucrece's faith in Tarquin's ability to reach this ideal of virtue—even up to the moment she is silenced—is the truest testament to her ethics. Interestingly, she never mentions consequences that might threaten Tarquin's actual ascent to the throne. She speaks of consequences that might haunt him as king but neglects consequences like dethronement or death. This omission is perhaps wise, as such warnings could appear treasonous threats instead of advice, but it is also possible that such threats are simply unthinkable to her until after she's suffered the rape. According to Warren Chernaik, Lucrece displays a decided loyalty to the monarchy throughout the poem, even when she demands Tarquin's death at the end (37), so her loyalty may well preclude such thoughts. Furthermore, avoiding these consequences leaves the public part of Tarquin's social identity partially intact. True, he may be immoral, but he will still be king, and so long as that holds true, his life, power, and privileges do not change. Towards the end of her plea, she returns again and again to the concepts of self-control and kingly virtue. She implores Tarquin, "By him that gave it three, / From a pure heart command thy rebel will" (624-5), and she "sue[s] for exiled majesty's repeal" (640). Tarquin's refusal to acknowledge these arguments and his own responsibility marks his failure as an ethical audience: he deliberately and consciously chooses immorality despite being aware of its evil and its potential negative consequences. As Kahn states, "Whatever she does, Lucrece cannot



avoid being raped” (*Roman Shakespeare* 37), but her attempt nonetheless proves that the responsibility for the speech’s rhetorical failure—just like the rape—is Tarquin’s alone. Even if we were to read Lucrece’s faith as a naïve misreading of an irredeemably corrupt auditor, that reading would not change our expectations for her argument. Disillusionment would not make her any more capable of overcoming Tarquin’s unethical reception. Ultimately, Lucrece’s plea—like Lavinia’s—demonstrates the importance of an ethical audience and the dangerous paradoxes of female virtue and agency in Shakespeare’s Rome.

### **Silence and Erasure**

Despite their rhetorical failures, Virgilia, Calpurnia, Octavia, Lavinia, and Lucrece all demonstrate the potential of female speech. Virgilia, technically successful as a minor partner in Volumnia’s rhetoric, helps save Rome from her husband. Calpurnia’s lasting success might have prevented—or at least delayed—Caesar’s death and civil war, while Octavia’s would have restored peace in a divided Roman empire. Although highly unlikely, Lavinia’s success might have also created peace and avoided a terrible, bloody feud. Last, Lucrece’s success would have saved her life, her honor, Tarquin’s honor, and, possibly, the Tarquin monarchy. Even restricted to private, domestic spaces, women have the potential to drastically change the course of events.

Although Virgilia, Octavia, Calpurnia, and Lavinia fail to persuade, their greatest rhetorical weaknesses are misreading their audiences and casting themselves as—if not also believing themselves to be—powerless; Lucrece, although she makes many of these same errors initially, discovers her rhetorical force by turning the shame and powerlessness of the victim onto her attacker, thereby shaming Tarquin and making him

the full focus of deliberation and epideixis. Unfortunately, issues of agency, female virtue, and unethical audiences virtually guarantee rhetorical failure for all of these women, and even the potential for more powerful but ethically questionable tactics cannot overcome the social and cultural disadvantages for and victimization of these female speakers. In all five cases, these women serve as mere sites for the enactment of male vice or ambition. The fact that each woman is silenced—either by violence or narrative “erasure”—reinforces the dangers of society’s focus on signifying female virtue and the limited agency that “properly” virtuous women hold within Shakespeare’s Rome. This problem is epitomized in Lavinia’s mutilation and Lucrece’s silencing by Tarquin: as Kahn states, “When Tarquin muffles Lucrece’s cries with the folds of her nightgown as he rapes her, though his act is brutal and unlawful, though he penetrates what ought to remain closed, at the same time he but repeats and reinforces the dominant tendency of the culture in concealing, sealing off, muffling women’s desire and women’s speech” (*Roman Shakespeare* 36). This is why the agency and ethics of female speech matter, and, as we shall see in the following chapters, why the role of rhetorical ethics is so important to our consideration of the more empowered agency of Portia and Volumnia, as well as Lucrece at the end of *The Rape of Lucrece*. Against this precedent of failure and silencing, the ethically questionable rhetoric and agency of Shakespeare’s stronger female speakers seem necessary at least, if not wholly justified.

### CHAPTER 3. VOLUBLE WOMEN: DELIBERATIVE EMULATION AND THE AGENCY OF EPIDEICTIC SHAMING

While Shakespeare's less successful female speakers struggle with poor rhetorical skills, unethical audiences, and performances restricted by gender norms, his more successful ones abandon restrictions on performance and use sophisticated rhetorical techniques to persuade their audiences. These women, notably Lucrece, Portia, and Volumnia, employ emulation and shaming to overcome resistant or unethical auditors. In many ways, Gary Wills's statement about Antony's funeral oration in *Julius Caesar* encapsulates this adeptness:

[Antony] does not, as Bacon thought, show the insufficiency of any one approach by his refusal to rely upon it. Rather, his different rhetorical devices play into and strengthen one another. He passes the only test that matters in classical rhetoric—audience response. As Cicero put it, "The effect of the orator is in the affect of his hearers." (81-2)

Lucrece, Portia, and Volumnia pass this test, but they do so by emulating male virtues and challenging the traditional signifiers of female performance. This tactic increases the effectiveness of their rhetoric, but its ethical dubiousness plays out in a number of troubling ways.

The agency displayed by these women, including the decision to challenge social and ethical norms, demonstrates both the potential and the risks for female speakers in Shakespeare's Rome. Civic duty and familial honor require effective persuasion, but each female character plays out the battle between ethics and necessity with telling variations. In *The Rape of Lucrece*, Lucrece's rhetoric fails with Tarquin yet succeeds with her husband, and the role of suicide in her success has intrigued scholars for centuries. *Julius Caesar*'s Portia engages in a similar climactic move—in action, effect, and critical

reception—but under different circumstances. In particular, the effect of suicide or self-wounding marks a turning point for Lucrece and Portia, respectively. By contrast, *Coriolanus*'s Volumnia persuades without offending propriety, but her ethics are still troubled by her motives and her use of shame. Although—or perhaps because—she challenges gender norms in an entirely different fashion, she is the most commonly maligned of Shakespeare's Roman women and is often compared to Lady Macbeth. These three women demonstrate the effectiveness of emulation and shaming for female speakers, but they also open the door to ethical conflicts and transgressions of gender.

In overcoming the challenge of the unethical auditor, successful persuasion puts the legitimacy of rhetorical means in question. Scott Crider states that a good rhetor is one “whose means are both legitimate and effective” (47), but determining “legitimacy” is problematic for female speakers. These women demonstrate rhetorical skill, but Crider reminds us that bridging the gap between skill and persuasion requires an ethically charged choice: “one must *choose* which techniques to use, and that is an ethical decision” (46). Although some of the auditors may pose ethical problems, the choices women make in order to move them extend beyond traditional limits. Here we will attempt to understand how audience and contextual necessity affect the concept of “legitimate” rhetorical means for Shakespeare's female Roman speakers.

### **Legitimate Means**

In the previous chapter we discussed how otherwise ethical rhetoric could fail because, as Crider articulates, the speaker did not employ all legitimate means available (46, 58). In this chapter, we will see that Shakespeare's more effective female speakers explore all possible means, some of them transgressive. Through emulation, shaming,

and delivery, Lucrece, Portia, and Volumnia argue for their self worth and authority as much as they argue their deliberative ends.

Lucrece's speech to her husband demonstrates the potential of rendering *ethos* prior. While Tarquin's vice impedes Lucrece's attempt to speak and act ethically, her husband's virtue is enabling. Unfortunately, her belief in her own virtue is damaged by Tarquin's crime, and she must rebuild it for herself before she can perform a confidently virtuous *ethos* for her husband and his companions. Her use of the complaint genre (Weaver 421)—with apostrophes to time, opportunity, and night—allows her to self-identify as a blameless victim of Tarquin's crime. The genre's traditions then give her space to blame and seek justice from night, time, and opportunity in turn. William Weaver claims that these monologues are a matter of rhetorical invention in the judicial mode, preparation for Lucrece's final argument to her husband (423-4), in which reclaims her agency. She starts with a complaint that asserts her innocence but offers no real agency or resolution; however, as she continues, she progresses towards true rhetorical agency. The key to this development is an ecphrasis of a painting of Troy, which inspires Lucrece's rhetorical imitation of the classical figure Hecuba. Platt states that "...this painting permits Lucrece to understand her rape in terms which are political and civic" (33) and ground her later rhetoric. She seeks Tarquin's punishment not only for her own benefit but for her family's and Rome's as well. Identifying with Hecuba also helps Lucrece articulate her pain and anger, which support her rhetorical delivery. According to Weaver, "It was a commonplace of classical rhetoric that in order to make an audience weep, the orator had to first feel sorrow. Lucrece's channeling of grief through the image of Hecuba should perhaps be seen, then, as another preparation for her impending

rhetorical performance” (443). In truth, the need for performance is paramount: without clear evidence of the crime against her, Lucrece’s argument and honesty are solely dependent on that performance (Dubrow 407).

Lucrece’s identification with Hecuba connects her to a literary tradition of wronged women driven mad by grief and out for vengeance. But Lucrece expends her rage upon the painting (1564-56), and thus she manages to turn her agency onto a more socially acceptable path: she cannot or will not take direct and “inappropriate” action against Tarquin, but she can empower her husband and father to do so. Though a limited form of agency, speaking the truth is how she can see her will done:

‘Well, well, dear Collatine, thou shalt not know  
The stained taste of violated troth;  
I will not wrong thy true affection so,  
To flatter thee with an infringed oath;  
.  
For me, I am the mistress of my fate,  
And with my trespass never will dispense,  
Till life to death acquit my forced offence.

‘I will not poison thee with my attaint,  
Nor fold my fault in cleanly-coin’d excuses;  
My sable ground of sin I will not paint,  
To hide the truth of this false night’s abuses:  
My tongue shall utter all; mine eyes, like sluices,  
As from a mountain-spring that feeds a dale,  
Shall gush pure streams to purge my impure tale.’  
(Shakespeare, *The Rape of Lucrece* 1058-78)

By letting her tongue “utter all,” Lucrece becomes “the mistress of [her] fate” and wrests control from Tarquin. In doing so, she honors her marriage to her husband and purifies herself: divulging her secret allows her to prove her chastity and seek redress.

Lucrece's speech to Collatine and his compatriots relies mostly on judicial argument to justify revenge on Tarquin. She begins her speech with a statement of her subject's gravity as well as the need for brevity in her sorrow and exhaustion:

'Few words...shall fit the trespass best,  
Where no excuse can give the fault amending.  
In me more woes than words are now depending,  
And my laments would be drawn out too long  
To tell them all with one poor tired tongue. (*The Rape of Lucrece* 1613-18)

Weaver states that this opening "...borrows two places of invention for the formal prologue, which was supposed to capture the audience's good will, attention, and patience" (434); indeed, it is clearly reminiscent of the typical orator's tactics of disclaiming eloquence and the "doleful, plain voice...interrupted with woeful exclamations and ruthless repetitions" recommended by Renaissance philosopher Thomas Wright (Greenstadt 65-6). In using these techniques, the story that follows avoids the point of "'hystericized' femininity" that would "alienate sympathy" (Kerrigan 56). Thus, she assumes the role of a public orator defending a case, even if she "play[s] her part like an actress" (Dubrow 407). This contrast of silent distress and voiced reason not only inspires greater *pathos*, but it also elicits admiration for the ethical ground of her action.

Lucrece's story of the rape is terse and deliberately spare of rhetorical flourish. This straightforwardness serves her ultimate purpose: before she can accuse Tarquin and demand revenge, she must first be acquitted of any sin—or consent—in the rape. In other words, she must establish her innocence of adultery, and she does so in lines whose alliteration and assonance evoke the inhuman and monstrous force of her attacker (*The Rape of Lucrece* 1625, 1627). In addition, her frank retelling of events suits the judicial

bent of her speech: “The forensic nature of Lucrece’s report of the deed is clear in her deployment of the ‘circumstances,’ or the six topics covered in a *narratio*: who, what, where, when, how, and why” (Weaver 435). Her formulation fends off alternative interpretations and forestalls any doubts about her behavior.

Interestingly, Lucrece uses the role of the victim to great effect, but doing so requires her to downplay her own rhetorical efforts against Tarquin. Where such a characterization would likely be harmful to an authoritative *ethos* in deliberative rhetoric—as the rhetoric of Shakespeare’s less effective Roman women has proven—it supports the *ethos* necessary for Lucrece’s current judicial ends: she must be the helpless victim in order to be undeniably innocent. For this reason she describes her own argument against Tarquin in the simple words, “I did begin to start and cry” (1639). She then reinforces the accusation by saying,

‘Mine enemy was strong, my poor self weak,  
And far the weaker with so strong a fear.  
My bloody judge forbade my tongue to speak;  
No rightful plea might plead for justice there.’ (1656-9)

These lines clarify her loss of agency and indict Tarquin as a violator not only of the weak, but of any claim to justice. Again, while emphasizing weakness is harmful in deliberative cases, in Lucrece’s judicial attempt to prove her innocence the tactic proves highly effective: physically weak, she cannot be expected to fight back. This careful construction of helplessness creates sympathy for the victim of rape in a culture typically insensitive to it.

Sympathy brings us back to a problem we discussed in the previous chapter: audience. At the end of *The Rape of Lucrece*, Lucrece speaks to a sympathetic and far more ethical audience, and, although she fears they will reject and judge her as an



adulterer, her self-portrayal as a victim of injustice elicits pity. Indeed, Weaver claims that the word “excuse” in “teach me to make my own excuse” requires Lucrece to prove herself innocent of complicity (436-7), but the plea similarly demands her audience’s support. To make this excuse, she creates a logical argument that separates the “stained” body from the “immaculate and spotless ... mind” (1655-6). For example, she repurposes Tarquin’s claim that “my poor beauty had purloined his eyes” (1651), using the personification and synecdoche that separated Tarquin from his guilt in order to separate herself from his crime. In the process, Lucrece’s plea bears some similarity to Antony’s funeral oration, in which “Antony does not call himself noble, as Brutus called himself honorable. Antony gets others to do it for him, and their testimony is weightier than self-praise” (Wills 96). Both Lucrece and Antony ask their audiences to testify to their personal character. For Lucrece, then, “teach me to make my own excuse” does not ask for their rhetorical instruction; instead, it invites her audience’s judgment of the case based on the facts and character she has provided. Their decision in her favor proves how utterly convinced they are of the virtuous *ethos* she has cultivated; in turn, their support proves the legitimacy of her semi-public speech and her publication of a very private crime.

Despite the effectiveness of focusing on her own *ethos*, Lucrece also explores the means of not only appealing to but manipulating the *ethos* of Collatine and her other auditors. In the case of Collatine in particular, Lucrece’s story emphasizes her attempt to protect both his and her own reputation, a duty that he owes to her in turn. By continually returning to Collatine’s reputation and responsibility, Lucrece guarantees his cooperation as a proper husband. She first stresses their shared obligation by addressing his

investment in the situation: “Dear husband, in the interest of thy bed ...” (1619). This line bears the uncomfortable implications of pre-Renaissance laws about the husband’s “ownership” of his wife, but, for the sake of her argument, it configures Collatine as a victim of Tarquin’s crime who must also seek redress. In this way, her simple address demands retribution for his wronged honor as much as hers, but it also configures vengeance as a matter of civic duty:

Be suddenly revenged on my foe—  
Thine, mine, his own. Suppose thou dost defend me  
From what is past. The help that thou shalt lend me  
Comes all too late, yet let the traitor die,  
For sparing justice feeds iniquity. (1683-7)

Lucrece supports the *ethos* and *pathos* of her argument with enthymematic reasoning: a Roman man serves the well-being of the state, and if allowing the rapist to live harms the state, then it is Collatine’s civic duty to kill the yet unnamed, traitorous attacker.

Furthermore, there is an implied shame in that Collatine “[c]omes all too late” to actually protect his wife from harm (1686); failing to avenge her would be an even greater shame. He must protect her honor and the state’s well-being by bringing justice to a criminal, a “traitor” to the state (1686), and to do otherwise would make him a lesser man and an unworthy citizen. The combination of shame and appeal to the greater good, the *utile*, appeals to Collatine’s *ethos* as a Roman male.

After this argument, Lucrece immediately adapts it for the attendant Roman gentry, including her father and Lucius Junius Brutus, the man credited with the founding of the Roman Republic. While her argument operates on the same tactics of the deliberative genre, this time it draws on the chivalric tradition of medieval romance. Although this moment marks one of Shakespeare’s characteristic anachronisms, the

change in approach allows Lucrece to re-characterize herself with greater agency and expand her previous plea from Collatine alone to include his compatriots. The honor inherent in the romance's chivalrous knighthood inspire her secondary male audience to actually take part in this "quest"; the chivalric knight is a worthy subject of emulation and therefore serves as a motivating ideal. Lucrece appeals to emulation in her audience by calling them "fair lords" (1688). She reinforces this rhetorical appeal by speaking of their "honourable faiths" and stating that "... 'tis a meritorious fair design / To chase injustice with revengeful arms" (1690, 1692-3). In making these claims, Lucrece identifies what behaviors make an "honourable" man, tacitly stating that failing to avenge her is dishonorable. The final line of the stanza drives this idea home while reinforcing the reference to romance: "Knights, by their oaths, should right poor ladies' harms" (1694). These men are, as citizens and noblemen, essentially pre-sworn to help her. By first priming her audience to swear and take action or else forswear their oaths and honor, Lucrece ensures that the men will act against Tarquin, because their fear of shame outweighs any political reservations.

The men's *ethos* is not the only *ethos* affected by this argument, however: although she retains the role of the victim she now takes on an air of command, much like a queen. Indeed, where before she pleaded, here she demands: "But ere I name him, you fair lords... / Shall plight your honourable faiths to me" (1688-90). The change in her tone reflects her assumption of this new, authoritative *ethos* and its accompanying agency. Lucrece's rhetorical skill thus effectively bridges the gap between the *pathos* of the victim and the authoritative *ethos* of the chaste queen. Not only do the men immediately promise to avenge her, but they also firmly avow her purity in spite of the

crime against her (1695-1700, 1709-10). Her combined argument and reputation are so powerful that they transcend cultural prejudices against victims of rape.

Portia's speech to Brutus in *Julius Caesar* bears many similarities to Lucrece's: she, too, must prove her own *ethos* while manipulating her auditor's. Unlike the other Roman women in these works, Portia has no habitual *ethos* pre-established through mute action or other characters' testimony. Although this might seem a disadvantage, it highlights her skill in rhetorical self-creation: the Portia of this speech exists entirely as a construction of her rhetorical performance. That self embodies the *ethos* of not only an ideal wife but also of a woman demanding the equality purportedly granted partners in marriage.

Portia's opening lines establish her goodwill as a concerned wife, one worried by her husband's recently unsettling behavior. She pleads with him to make her "acquainted with your cause of grief" (*Julius Caesar* 2.1.255), thus asserting her goodwill (*eunoia*) and generating the *ethos* of a caring, neglected wife. Soon after, she logically unravels Brutus's excuse that he is simply ill (2.1.260-9), proving her wisdom as well. Although these sections also shame, they effectively provide evidence of her goodwill and wisdom without her having to argue them directly. After Brutus attempts to rebuff her, she turns away from the gentle plea to a demand for equality and respect, claiming that "by the right and virtue of my place / I ought to know of" what is unsettling him (2.1.268-9).

Portia employs a number of means in pursuit of this persuasive end. She mentions her "once-commended beauty" and "all [Brutus's] vows of love" (2.1.270-1), references that appeal to *pathos* through Brutus's love and *ethos* through the cultural equation of appearance and virtue. She further emphasizes this appeal by kneeling, an act which,

although a cultural norm (Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare* 157), subtly performs the inequality caused by his treatment of her: if he were “gentle”—treating her as an equal—she would not need to kneel (*Julius Caesar* 2.1.278). The shaming here undermines his identity and reputation, and Portia achieves this effect by challenging his supposed constancy: she states that he has stood around, “musing and sighing” and, while his behavior seems “an effect of humour, / Which sometime hath his hour with every man” (2.1.239, 249-50), it has consumed him and his typical *virtus*. She claims that his behavior has been so extreme, so unlike him, that “could it work so much upon your shape / As it hath much prevailed on your condition, / I should not know you Brutus” (2.1.252-4). In other words, his behavior creates an incongruity between his actions and his reputation to such an extent that his *ethos* is held intact only by the constant of his physical form. Kahn states that, in this moment, Brutus’s “Roman identity is, however fleetingly, compromised” (80), and, in that space, Portia can create within her rhetoric and personal *ethos* an alternative performance of *romanitas* and *virtus* that Brutus should emulate.

Portia’s more effective techniques play heavily on Brutus’s *ethos* as it reflects in her. Portia employs her knowledge of herself and her husband to manipulate his *ethos*, much like Cassius does according to Crider’s description: “Cassius perceives of the rhetor-subject-audience relation in terms of a mirror: the rhetor reflects an audience to itself, self-knowledge requiring as it does representations of the self” (49). Unlike Cassius’s unethical use of this approach, Portia uses it ethically in combination with the marriage bond to improve Brutus’s virtue and self-awareness as a husband. She achieves this end by speaking of herself as “your self, your half” (2.1.273), rhetorically merging

her *ethos* with her husband's and thereby making it unreasonable for Brutus to treat her as any less capable than himself.

Despite the "equality" in marriage, Portia still faces the basic prejudices against female constancy. Like Queen Elizabeth, who transforms "a perceived gender liability into an asset" by configuring her political role as more influential to her character than her sex (Rose 36), Portia acknowledges the prejudices against her sex and promptly reconfigures her *ethos* in terms of her husband's and father's reputations. In doing so, she turns cultural doubts about the female sex into doubts about Brutus's judgment and his respect for herself and her father:

I grant I am a woman, but withal  
A woman that Lord Brutus took to wife.  
I grant I am a woman, but withal  
A woman well reputed, Cato's daughter.  
Think you I am no stronger than my sex,  
Being so fathered and so husbanded? (291-6)

Discussing the source of this argument in Plutarch, Bradley Buszard states that her manner of glorifying Cato and Brutus constructs an argument in which "their combined nobility compensates for her own innate frailty" (88). In Shakespeare's version, Portia claims that Brutus's treatment has reduced her to nothing more than "a woman," but within four lines she reconstructs her *ethos* by virtue of association: she cannot be "just a woman" if Brutus is her husband and Cato her father. Altman remarks that it was typical of Roman rhetoric for a man to "draw on his own social reputation and that of his family to establish his *ethos*" (67), but Portia uses both approaches effectively. By emulating Brutus indirectly, she actually begins to outdo him as a rhetor through the force of her reason.

Portia's appeal to virtue by association does more than simply build her *ethos*, however. Any auditor withholding the respect deserved by a virtuous woman is itself a source of shame for the early modern era, and the accusations against Brutus's behavior show that he has failed in that regard. Castiglione states in *The Book of the Courtier* that "...there is no man so shameless and high minded, but beeth a great reverence towarde them that be counted good and honest, bicause that gravitie tempered with knowlege and goodnes, is (as it were) a shield against the wanton pride and beastlines of saucy merchauntes" (218). The fact that failing to recognize virtue in a woman is itself shameful leads to one of Portia's more punishing accusations: she claims that Brutus's refusal of her confidence makes her merely his "self / ...in sort or limitation" (2.1.281-2), "Brutus's harlot, not his wife" (2.1.286). Buszard discusses the same moment in Plutarch, remarking that this claim simultaneously flatters and shames Brutus:

The distinction she makes is in a certain sense flattering to Brutus: men who keep concubines are often abused in Plutarch as decadent easterners, slaves to both their passions and their women. At the same time, the very fact that [Portia] must remind Brutus of the distinction is itself a reproach. He should not require it. (87)

Brutus is better than these "decadent easterners," and yet his behavior is more like theirs than an honorable Roman's. Thus, Portia's argument tacitly claims that his refusal to confide is a direct affront to her own *ethos* and, consequently, his. Although the title of harlot should shame her, it is employed in such a way that it directs the shame onto Brutus. Platt states that Brutus may be withholding from Portia simply because of the culturally perceived weakness of women (223), but her argument overcomes that prejudice through the cultural definition of the marriage bond and the enhancement of her own *ethos*.

More so than even Portia or Lucrece, Coriolanus's mother Volumnia has been repeatedly recognized by scholars as a powerful speaker, even earning the generally male-restricted title of "orator" from a variety of critics.<sup>16</sup> Much of her rhetorical power originates in her unique and formidable *ethos*. She is a respected Roman matron, a widow and mother of a war hero, and she fully engages—although perhaps not in the best way—her responsibility for the "moral upbringing" of her son (O'Day 241), as well as his political education (Piazza 131). As a mother, she gains an unprecedented flexibility and authority specific to her Roman culture: "While in Athens the woman's role—as a mother—was merely biological, in Rome it was political because the mother was dignified with the task of educating and governing her children" (129-30). In addition, as an older noblewoman and widow, Volumnia carries "[a]ll the virtues of classical old age—expediency, experience, flexibility—are projected onto Volumnia making her the only Roman *statesman*, a Jacobean Machiavellian governor...." (129). Compared to the other Roman women, Volumnia has the most advanced status in age and child-rearing and can claim her son the greatest warrior in Rome. As both mother and father for her son, Volumnia seems occupy a nearly transcendent space, though she cannot fully overcome the exclusion of women from the public forum.

Volumnia's *ethos* clearly benefits from her status as an older woman, a widow, and a mother, but it also draws on Coriolanus's own reputation. Her *ethos* is grounded in her son's *ethos*, just as Portia's is in Brutus's. The difference here is that Coriolanus's *ethos* is reciprocally bound to his mother's body as well as her martial philosophy, and,

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<sup>16</sup> See Luckyj; Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare*, "Mother of Battles: Volumnia and Her Son in *Coriolanus*"; West, Michael and Myron Silberstein. "The Controversial Eloquence of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*—an Anti-Ciceronian Orator?" *Modern Philology* 102.3 (Feb. 2005): 307-331.



because the procreative role allows mothers to “share in the authority and honor according to fathers” (Carter 157), he owes her not only the respect due to a mother but to a father as well. When Coriolanus finally returns to Rome in 2.1, he demonstrates his obligation by formally kneeling before her while thanking her for her wishes of “prosperity” (2.1.166-7). Throughout the play, Volumnia enhances her *ethos* by emphasizing her influence and Coriolanus’s obligation, saying “Thy valiantness was mine, thou sucked’st it from me...” (3.2.129), and later, “Thou art my warrior. / I help to frame thee” (5.3.63-4). Coriolanus, obsessed with self-determination, focuses instead on Volumnia’s procreative role, describing his mother as “the honoured mould / Wherein this trunk was framed” (5.3.22-23), but despite the difference in their emphasis, the filial duty to honor the mother is the same.

Throughout the play, Volumnia uses her *ethos* and Coriolanus’s obligation to shame him into compliance. When he refuses to make a plea before the plebeians, Volumnia repeats explicit variations of Coriolanus’s responsibility and fault for the consequences of his decision four times in nine lines: “At thy choice” (Shakespeare, *Coriolanus* 3.2.123), “Do as thou list” (128), “...owe thy pride to thyself” (130), and “Do your will” (137). By making him the cause of “ruin” (125), she places the shame for that destruction solely with him. The *pathos* of shame as both a current feeling and rational consequence of his decision are only exacerbated by the *pathos* Volumnia exploits as a disapproving mother and claimed paragon of *virtus*. After Coriolanus rejects this effort, she returns to the power of her personal *ethos* as his mother. She punctuates her superiority and position by stating, “To beg of thee it is my more dishonor / Than thou of [the plebs] (3.2.124-5). With this statement, she steals his self-characterization as a

martyr for honor and places him instead in the role of a traitorous, disobedient son. The *pathos* of shame at his mother's anger and disappointment matters far more to Coriolanus than that of his peers, because he believes Volumnia's claims that she is the source of his identity and virtue.

Unfortunately for Coriolanus's goal of autonomy, his mother better understands the bonds and privileges of family and Rome, and she knows that Coriolanus's identity and honor are authored by herself and the city as much as by his own deeds. Kahn states that "Volumnia's rhetorical coaching implies that gender is acted, not natural" (*Roman Shakespeare* 154), and Marta Cerezo Moreno takes the idea farther when she remarks that the entire play "functions as a controlling apparatus that defeats Coriolanus' attempts to fashion his own identity. Such selfhood is ultimately portrayed as something that can be manipulated, as an artful process" (206). All of Coriolanus's relationships and his community at large take part in this process; thus, the key to Volumnia's persuasion is her ability to make the truth and *pathos* of this co-authorship felt in spite of her son's obstinacy. Whether he wants to or not, Coriolanus feels his filial obligation, his shame, and the indebtedness of his honor and social identity to his mother and Rome. Volumnia merely needs to make him admit it.

Volumnia's *ethos* derives even more authority from the rest of her family and Coriolanus's peers. In many scenes, she speaks for her family's interests or steps in when Coriolanus's peers cannot persuade him: "I am in this / Your wife, your son, these senators, the nobles," she remarks at one point (3.2.64-5). Despite the fact that there are several patrician men and senators in 3.2, the men defer to Volumnia, and Menenius is particularly supportive of her arguments (3.2.30, 46, 69). More than any other Roman

woman—especially one who has no political power of her own—Volumnia acts and speaks with public male approval; but more importantly she becomes a symbol of Rome itself. According to Kathryn Schwarz, Volumnia’s *ethos* “coincides with the ethos that defines [Rome’s] celebrated space” (*What You Will* 211), and Susanne L. Wofford states that Volumnia “represents ... the body politic itself, Mother Rome” (12). The clearest example of this occurs when Volumnia equates the “country”—Rome—with her “womb” (3.124-5). By the end of the play, she metaphorically carries the entire *ethos* of Rome, an *ethos* that makes her the ultimate authority on *romanitas* and civic duty, even if the ethical “rightness” of that authority is in doubt.

### **Performing Emulation and Shaming**

Although Portia and Lucrece create effective, authoritative *ethos*, their deliberative rhetoric seems to require something more. This “something more” consists of shaming and emulation, ultimately realized in a performance of self-wounding, presented as a signifier of male virtue as well as a logical proof. *Pathos* infuses the act, too, which makes self-wounding a sublime moment of overwhelming rhetorical force. Unfortunately, this action clearly exceeds the limitations of female behavior, because the women emulate virtues of *romanitas* that are “synonymous with masculinity” (Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare* 14). The exclusion of these virtues from the female sphere draws into question the ethics of their performative acts. Even Lucrece’s suicide, which has ethical precedents in Plutarch and other classical historians, does not go without criticism within the poem. Self-wounding is thus an incredibly effective means, but its legitimacy is questionable for a number of reasons.

The persuasiveness of such acts lies in their power of delivery (*hypokrisis*), which Aristotle describes as having “the greatest force” in speeches (*On Rhetoric* 1403b). Although he limits delivery to tone, emotion, volume and rhythm, Cicero expands upon it to include “action of the body ... gesture ... look, and ... modulation and variation of the voice” (*On Oratory* 1.5). These performances of self-wounding incorporate elements of both Aristotelian and Ciceronian delivery: “As part of the rhetorical art of *actio*, gestures were credited with a[n]...expressive capacity and sway over the beholder’s will and emotions” (Thorne 116), and Shakespeare’s inclusion of them indicates gesture’s integral role in the rhetorical construct. Michele Marrapodi supports the integral nature of delivery to drama, saying, “The rhetoric of the body does in fact lend itself to an impressive series of striking theatrical forms since it is innate to the physicality of performance and to the natural ‘spectacle’ of the dramatic *action*” (197). Given the theatricality of these moments and the potential that self-wounding offers, the technical reasoning behind Lucrece’s and Portia’s performances is sound, even if their overall logic may be problematic.

For Portia, self-wounding provides the means for excelling or matching her husband through emulation of masculine fortitude. Indeed, her self-wounding is necessary for her to persuade Brutus of her constancy, but it comes at a cost:

... Brutus still fails to confide in Portia, and it is significant that Portia attempts to re-establish their union, not by calling upon her husband's femininity, but by denying her own. She reminds Brutus of “that great vow which did incorporate and make us one” and calls herself “your half,” but she depicts her sex as an obstacle, rather than a necessary component, to their union .... Apparently fearful that even these identifications with noble men will not suffice to raise her above the other members of her weak and despised sex, Portia then offers further proof of her

constancy—a “voluntary wound here, in the thigh,”  
symbolically attacking her sexuality in order to prove her  
Roman *virtus*. (Rackin 76-7)

Outside of the innumerable symbolic interpretations of such a wound, Portia’s act functions as a sign of not only fortitude and constancy but also service to the state (Cicero, *On Oratory* 2.28). Scars are a physical sign of a man’s service to his country: it is by displaying his wounds that Coriolanus becomes—however briefly—a man who can win the people’s love and support. According to Kahn, although wounds are a sign of “vulnerability...through the discursive operations of *virtus*, wounds become central to the signification of masculine virtue, and thus to the construction of the Roman hero” (*Roman Shakespeare* 17). Portia’s wound draws on this tradition. Frank Kermode remarks that, through it, she shows “stoical strength” and an awareness of being and acting Roman (87); in Portia’s case, part of that awareness is what is honorable among Roman men, a knowledge she does not hesitate to use. As a result, Brutus is overwhelmed by the *pathos* of affection for his wife as well as the monumental *ethos* of strength and constancy she demonstrates. He capitulates to her plea with a prayer to be “worthy of this noble wife” (302). In this moment, Portia rises above her husband, making herself a figure worthy of emulation.

Like Portia’s wounding, Lucrece’s suicide is a rhetorical *coup de grace*. Having proven the rape and her innocence, she next has to convince her audience to take action against a member of the monarchy who also happens to be her husband’s peer, if not his friend. Waiting until the end—and after her auditors have pledged to avenge her—might seem misleading, but it actually allows the men to make their oaths without the influence of politics. She begins this moment overwhelmed with emotion, hesitating and stumbling

in the effort to name her attacker. According to Wills, “Quintilian called this figure *interruptio*: ‘Speech interrupted by silence and hesitations.’ He said it convinces more than shouting could” (95). Indeed, the combination of *interruptio* and her suicide creates a powerful rhetorical performance:

She throws forth Tarquin’s name; ‘He, he,’ she says,  
But more than ‘he’ her poor tongue could not speak;  
Till after many accents and delays,  
Untimely breathings, sick and short assays,  
She utters this, ‘He, he, fair lords, ‘tis he,  
That guides this hand to give this wound to me.’  
(Shakespeare, *The Rape of Lucrece* 1717-22)

The *pathos* of her sudden speechlessness is powerful enough, but verbally placing Tarquin’s hand on the sword allows her to substitute her dead body for the expected wounds in an accusation of rape (Bashar 34, 36). According to Weaver, Lucrece’s action literally transforms the case from one of rape to one of murder: in that case, vengeance was a culturally accepted response, and “testimony about the unnatural flow of blood from a corpse was admissible as evidence of murder in Elizabethan criminal courts” (447). By Elizabethan standards, then, the two streams of blood—“Some of her blood still pure and red remain’d, / And some look’d black, and that false Tarquin stain’d” (1742-3)—prove rape, not adultery. Peter Smith argues that this essentially makes the crime visible: “Injustice is not only done, but it is *seen to be done* and the reason this is important is because chastity is as much about public—that is political—reputation as personal virtue” (23-24). Indeed, proving that the crime was rape saves Lucrece’s honor and her husband’s, but it also underscores Tarquin’s crime.

Physical evidence is not the only support for the ethics of her suicide. While she takes her life in part for her own peace of mind, she also sees it as a way to clear

Collatine of shame by association and give his revenge an ethical foundation: “My resolution, love, shall be thy boast, / By whose example thou revenged mayst be” (1193-4). As Kahn notes, her death has the admirable effect of “maintain[ing] the ideological purity of chastity for future generations, by making her suicide a symbolic purification of the pollution of her chastity wrought by the rape” (*Roman Shakespeare* 66), but Chernaik remarks that it also protects her husband: “Lucrece, like her adversary Tarquin, sees herself as appendage to, or property of, her husband Collatine: a stain on her honour is a stain on his honour, which she has an obligation to safeguard” (Chernaik 50). If nothing else, her act removes the possibility that she might ever bear Tarquin’s child: “This bastard graft shall never come to growth. / He shall not boast, who did thy stock pollute, / That thou art doting father of his fruit” (1062-4). In this fashion, Lucrece’s suicide is justified by her desire to see justice done and her husband’s honor intact.

Unfortunately, her suicide is also ethically problematic, both for herself and her culture. Cultural beliefs about rape undermine Lucrece’s belief in her innocence and thus necessitate her death. Greenstadt claims that her adherence to this cultural belief likely heralds from “what Ian Donaldson has called a shame-based Roman culture in which a woman’s life was held to be of lesser value than her ability to retain her husband’s pure bloodline” (62). Despite this cruel imbalance, she continues to make herself a figure worthy of emulation by offering herself as a martyr. Lucrece believes that by going “unpunished” she would set a bad example, saying, “... no dame, hereafter living, / By my excuse shall claim excuse’s giving” (1714-15). This belief is extremely problematic, especially for modern audiences, but in the world of the play, Lucrece’s death is ethical, and her decision is justified by the streams of black and red blood, which symbolically

represent the physical stigma created by the rape (Kahn, "The Rape" 39-40). Given this evidence her concern with providing an eternal example of chastity, Lucrece's suicide may be troubling from a modern-day perspective but ethical and honorable within the contextual framework of her culture; even here, however, the contextual elements at play in *The Rape of Lucrece* are not entirely consistent, in part because the shame-based Roman culture has been blended with Christian guilt-based culture. We see this, for example, in Lucrece's fear that she might neglect her obligations to her husband by committing suicide: "Then let it not be called impiety..." (1174). Her doubts are reflected in Brutus's remark that her suicide was "childish humour" (1825). Shakespeare inherited these concerns from St. Augustine and later scholars who debated whether or not Lucrece's suicide was a sin. From their perspective, her death is not only unjustified but possibly a sign that she was not wholly innocent (Blits 421; Greenstadt 61-2). Nevertheless, Lucrece maintains a reputation for innocence throughout the critical and literary tradition. This likely originates in the understanding that chastity and virginity are their own performance: according to Schwarz, "As an 'anatomical metonym,' then, virginity makes inner truths interchangeable with public performances, confounds the actor with the target of action, and threatens to escape along an illimitable progression of desire" ("Death and Theory" 55). Because Lucrece successfully performs chastity and constancy despite this "illimitable progression of desire," even with the debatable justification of her suicide, she remains "chaste Lucrece" throughout the ages (*The Rape of Lucrece* 1839).

In contrast to Portia and Lucrece, Volumnia does not employ emulation in order to rise above her auditor: rather, Volumnia continually presents herself as a figure for



Coriolanus's emulation. As stated previously, Volumnia bears an authoritative female *ethos* that inspires obedience, but she is also capable of performing male *virtus* without sacrificing her identity as a mother. In the process, she plays out many of the conflicts of gender signification and virtue that complicate female rhetoric and male identity, as well as the ethics informing them in both a cultural and rhetorical context. We first see evidence of this when Volumnia advises Coriolanus to appeal to the plebs for consular election. In order to persuade him, she must overcome the cognitive dissonance he suffers between the absolute *romanitas* she raised him to espouse and the more Machiavellian virtue she now advocates. As Phyllis Rackin states, such false humility goes against Coriolanus's very conception of who he is: he cannot reconcile how he signifies *virtus* and *romanitas* with the role she has given him and thus pleads to "play the man I am" (3.2.15-6). Volumnia must therefore redefine that identity or overwhelm it so that he can—or *must*—signify masculinity according to her new definition, regardless of his internal dissociation. Her statement that "I have a heart as little apt as yours, / But yet a brain that leads my use of anger / To better vantage" demonstrates her typical approach (3.2.29-31): she lays claim to her own *ethos*—without needing to argue it first—and uses the contrast between herself and her son to shame him failing to emulate her and her signification of *romanitas* and *virtus*.

Not only do these lines strengthen and confirm her pre-existing *ethos* as a martial and wise woman, but they also use *logos* to establish her as more emotionally controlled and "constant" than Coriolanus is. Within a single sentence, she shames Coriolanus for falling short of her intellect and stoic self-control. Her unique situation grants these tactics a certain ethical legitimacy, but her rhetorical ethics suffers from the interference

of ambition and goodwill. No matter how sympathetically we read Volumnia's character—and few critics grant her that leniency—she cannot be wholly removed from her ambition for her son's honor and her own as unparalleled servants of the state. Still, her need for this type of rhetoric is due in part to her own failure as a teacher or Coriolanus's as a student: "...Coriolanus is the student of *romanitas* who has never absorbed the lesson of the professional trajectory of Latin learning in the Renaissance: administrative service, social promotion, cultural-political 'marketability'" (Correll 34). Volumnia's rhetoric must overcome Coriolanus's resistance to this void in his cultural knowledge, and typically legitimate means may not be sufficient to achieve her ends.

Even at his most obstinate, Coriolanus is subject to his mother's *ethos*, and all of the obligations inherent in their relationship; however, Volumnia must employ considerable shaming to move him. Her shaming forces her son to acknowledge both her *ethos* and his obligations: "There's no man in the world / More bound to's mother" (5.3.159-60), she says in her final speech, and his obstinacy is equivalent to making her "prate / Like one in the stocks" (5.3.160-1). According to Dollimore, "The appeal is a moral one, but what Volumnia signifies here is not motherhood so much as socialization .... The demands which she now makes of him merely lay bare his contradictory insertion in the prevailing social relations between and within Rome and Antium" (221-2). In other words, Coriolanus cannot maintain his connection to her—and the honor associated with fulfilling his filial duty—while serving the Volscians against Rome. Volumnia blends that socialization and obligation with *pathos* in her self-representation as the nurturing "hen" who has guided Coriolanus and led him to the honor he cherishes so dearly (*Coriolanus* 5.3.163), but to whom he fails in his filial duty. As both Rome and

his mother, Volumnia claims that his current stubbornness effectively erases his role as a treasured and “honest” son (5.3.167), particularly when she states, “Thou hast never in thy life / Showed thy dear mother any courtesy” (5.3.161-2). Technically, this claim is a falsehood, and yet Coriolanus’s behavior—his renouncement of Rome—makes it a retroactive fact and once more reasserts herself as the epitome of Roman virtue

Volumnia’s perpetual *ethos* is present, even when she kneels in supplication. When Coriolanus turns away from her delegation, Volumnia and the other women accompanying her kneel, with clear intent to shame him for his coldness and pride:

Down, ladies. Let us shame him with our knees.  
To his surname ‘Coriolanus’ ‘longs more pride  
Than pity to our prayers. Down! An end.  
This is the last. (*Coriolanus* 5.3.170-3)

There is no doubt of what Volumnia condemns in him, and her verbal statement of both the action and condemnation ensures that he hears and knows of both, even if he no longer faces them. As Marrapodi states, “...for the more worldly-wise Volumnia, one who is accustomed to the hypocrisy and Machiavellianism of politics, external appearance and the spectacular gesture are sufficient unto themselves and themselves become, if need be, political action; seeing is corroborated by hearing, and *action* obtains what reason is unable to communicate” (214). In addition, her doing so demonstrates Coriolanus’s limits as a Roman man:

When in the last act Volumnia mediates between her son and Rome and pleads with her son for Rome’s salvation, she enacts the lesson she had tried unsuccessfully to teach him. She kneels and performs a visual rhetoric she knows works better than words for the illiterate mob.... In this way she recognizes and emphasizes Coriolanus’s weakness, inability and failure rather than his heroic military successes. (Piazza 132)

Volumnia puts the entirety of her accusations into a single action, denouncing him as a failure in terms of politics and honor. She also performs a noble admission of defeat, and in doing so she turns Coriolanus's victory into something empty and shameful that undermines rather than swells his honor.

The greatest sign of Volumnia's *ethos*—and the power it grants her to dictate Roman virtue or shame men for failing to uphold it—is in her disownment of Coriolanus. Although she has attacked the contradictions between his identity as a Roman man and honorable soldier repeatedly, she has never broken the core of his identity as either: when she finally concedes defeat, she breaks that bond, saying, “This fellow had a Volscian to his mother. / His wife is in Corioles, and this child / Like him by chance” (5.3.181). This absolute rejection of this epideictic turn destroys the very foundation of Coriolanus's self-construction. His *ethos* as a great warrior, as well as all any military accomplishment, is wiped away by the one person whose recognition has ever mattered to him. With this disownment, Coriolanus's exile is absolute, and his life, his legacy, and his honor dismissed. This is possible because of Volumnia's *ethos* and, according to Schwarz, the role women play in social identity:

Women act so that men can be ... Their understanding of and acquiescence in a heterosocial schematic coincides with its viability as a social institution .... *All's Well* in this way insists on the priority of legible, articulate, and intentional bonds: maternal blood is not at issue in any narrowly material sense, but the rhetorical act of banishment calls up the entire network of relations that feminine knowledge might fabricate or undo. (*What You Will* 118)

Within this context, Volumnia's metaphorical incorporation of woman and country symbolizes just how reliant her son's identity is on the social constructions she and Rome

make possible. Her rejection does not simply complete Rome's sentence of exile and reconfirm him as a traitor: it erases him from the existence he's always known, leaving him alone to truly and horrifically be "the author of himself" as he wished. While Portia and Lucrece mirror ideals for their male auditors, Volumnia becomes her own version of the ideal; when she disowns Coriolanus, she shatters the mirror upon which he identifies himself.

When Coriolanus still does not speak, to acquiesce or deny, Volumnia finds a way to up the ante one step further. In her last words, she finishes by promising to curse him as Rome burns, adding her own voice to those who will make his name "dogged with curses" (*Coriolanus* 5.3.145): "I am hushed until our city be afire, / And then I'll speak a little" (5.3.182-3). Jarrett Walker notes that this moment goes far behind the threat itself, saying,

But the total silence at the moment of choice does seem to partake of both temporal and atemporal levels, of both speech and presence. It is an event in time, but its indeterminate length and total stillness give it an aspect of infinity, of time itself having stopped. It contains nothing but presence, but it is created out of speech, by the speaker's decision to fall silent. In the silence the two parallel realms of speech and the body, of Volumnia and Martius, intersect .... Volumnia has sustained Martius by her simultaneous generative narration of his deeds; now she can destroy him by falling silent. At the same time, her silence is her own defeat. She now needs her son to perform a truly original action, but this is one action that narration cannot generate. (183-4)

The balance of power this moment creates is a telling one. True, the power, like in every other deliberative case, lies in the auditor's hands, as only he can make the decision and take the action necessary to change his course of action; however, while the moment is a "defeat" or loss of power in that Volumnia must now relinquish control of the situation, it

is not completely so. Volumnia has simplified Coriolanus's options to the virtue of *utile*—tied to all of his investments and identity—or the empty *honestum* created by his pride. The only way he can undo her threats and restore both himself and their relationship is to grant her request, whatever the cost to himself.

Even if she is pursuing the greater good, Volumnia's rhetoric is ethically problematic, because it seems to ultimately deny Coriolanus any real choice. Indeed, his acquiescence acknowledges the agency and power inherent in Volumnia's epideictic exercise of maternal influence: he does not say, "I will do this," but instead asks, "O mother, mother! / What have you done?" (5.3.183-4). For many critics, this moment cannot be ethical. The power of her speech and Coriolanus's remark that her victory is like a "mortal" wound (5.3.190) recalls the greatest fears about rhetorical influence:

[When faced with] the seductive power of speech ...  
Renaissance theorists reacted by stressing 'the violence of  
the orator's penetration ... of his listener's soul' as a mode  
of 'aggressive, phallic assault' .... The orator should be a  
good man, classical rhetoric stipulated. But was he always?  
Mercury the god of eloquence was also the god of thieves.  
(West and Silberstein 326)

Volumnia's influence and agency as a speaker are something more than physical force, and Wofford describes her and Rome as figures of a "unity, that which draws everything into it and consumes it" (11-12). Just like Coriolanus is faced with two choices, Judith Weil states that we are faced with two ways of interpreting the ethics of this moment: "Must we see Coriolanus as a sacrifice to Volumnia and the Roman state (Kahn 158)? Or has his mother brought him to a consciousness of responsibility and given him a choice about what to do next?" (65). If we accept the former, Volumnia may have good ends but her means are troubled in their legitimacy on multiple levels; if the latter, Volumnia is the

epitome of the frank voice of virtue and a predominantly ethical rhetor. In truth, the play seems locked between these two possibilities. Coriolanus faces two equally damning choices that will destroy him one way or another, but his decision and Volumnia's means articulate the play's support of the *utile*, even when those who benefit from the practical decisions of those in power are not always ethical or honorable themselves.

### **The Consequences for Female Speech**

The ethics inherent in the speech and performances of Volumnia, Portia, and Lucrece hinges on the legitimacy of means that either shame or emulate beyond the limits of the auditor's agency or the woman's gender norms. Portia, Lucrece, and Volumnia justify their means for the sake of good ends and perhaps even necessity, but the tragic outcome for each woman suggests that such justification has long-term consequences within their culture.

Portia's self-wounding relies on an implicit enthymeme, wherein the major premise is that enacts and understands the responsibilities of both husband and wife better than Brutus. As effective as this tactic is, it reveals the unfortunate limitations of gender bias. Kahn remarks that "Portia shows, as it were, a fine discernment in this strategy of constructing herself as a man, for as I suggested earlier, men mutually confirm their identities as Roman through bonds with each other. Brutus can trust Portia only as a man" (*Roman Shakespeare* 99). Although whether or not Portia becomes truly equal to a man in Brutus's eyes is debatable, it is nonetheless true that she cannot gain his confidence without at least reaching a sort of sexless middle ground: she is "one" with her husband, and the masculine, Fisher King-style wound in her thigh signifies in place of her female genitalia. Her rhetorical ends ethically pursue good ends for Brutus, and,

indeed, Platt states that Portia is remarkably effective in achieving this good, at least for a short time: “Brutus emerges from his interview [with Portia] momentarily whole....Alas, never again will Brutus be so resolute, self-knowing, and whole. For he never speaks this way with Portia again” (233). Worse, the play’s confusing double announcement of her death leaves her impact on Brutus unclear.

The main ethical and cultural conflict for Portia, however, is that the erasure of her sex in pursuit of persuasion goes well beyond the ethical limits exemplified by Queen Elizabeth. For Portia, the incompatibility between what she emulates and what she is capable of becomes a source of emotional conflict and her eventual suicide, but that distress is as much a result of her cultural restriction to the household as it is her fortitude. Despite her successful argument for her worthiness as a confidante, Brutus dismisses her immediately after her speech so that he can meet with two co-conspirators (2.1.303-8). Later, in 2.4, her seclusion and exclusion leave her struggling with constancy, both in regard to keeping her husband’s secret and in regard to her emotional fortitude:

O constancy, be strong upon my side;  
Set a huge mountain ‘tween my heart and tongue.  
I have a man’s mind, but a woman’s might.  
How hard it is for women to keep counsel! (2.4.6-9)

The connection between her wound and her ability to maintain secrecy has a troublesome connection to the Antony’s metaphor describing Caesar’s wounds as mouths (3.2.215-21), and, in Kahn’s terms, Portia’s wound seems to speak to her weakness rather than her strength. Furthermore, her eventual suicide happens offstage with the minimal description that “she fell distraught, / And...swallowed fire” (4.2.207-8). Even though the manner of her death originates in Plutarch, it is difficult to ignore that she died by oral means. The play does not condemn her claim to constancy, and she never slips Brutus’s secret, but



reading her suicide as a final means to conquer “feminine” weakness reinforces the implication that her performance of constancy is nothing more than that—an act, not a transformation. Even if her transformation is real, Roman society will not allow a woman a life that is compatible with such an *ethos*, and thus she seems doomed to consequences arising from her ethically questionable performance. It is the most fundamental of paradoxes for female rhetoric and agency: her husband’s well-being requires her action, but, as quickly as she transgresses the norms of her gender, she finds herself imprisoned and helpless back within them.

In Lucrece’s case, we have already discussed the ethical implications of her suicide, but its aftermath reveals a further paradox in female agency. While she succeeds in motivating her audience to take revenge on Tarquin, Brutus is the first to take action and reinterprets her call for vengeance against the prince as reason to exile the entire royal family. She becomes the means to secure his own plot against the ruling family, and, in his hands, Lucrece’s “intentions may be misappropriated or silenced” (Greenstadt 69). Lucrece’s suicide is thus an act of paradoxical agency: dead, she must leave the interpretation and enactment of her rhetorical ends to her audience (Chernaik 51). In that vein, Weaver views her suicide as a sign of the insufficiency of traditional rhetoric for women who are victims of rape (448). Warren Chernaik reads it differently, seeing her traditional persuasion as successful on its own: “Once she has secured this promise, she re-enacts and cancels out the rape with a knife, confident that her words have unleashed the swords of her husband and family to wipe out ‘this forced stain’” (50). Regardless of whether the words are more powerful than the suicide or vice versa, the suicide cannot function rhetorically without the context of her speech. They are integrated in her

rhetorical effort, and together they combine to create a powerful, if unusual blend of judicial and deliberative rhetoric.

Whereas Portia tries to erase her femininity through emulation, Lucrece tries to reassert it. Ultimately, she is successful, but it comes at the cost of her life. Her virtuous *ethos* challenges the doubly victimizing assumptions about outspoken victims of rape: “to be raped and to speak about it are thus similarly indecorous, alluding to matters about which women in particular ought to be silent. In giving Lucrece a tongue, Shakespeare performs works *against* the patriarchal codes that, at the same time, he puts into her mouth” (Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare* 28). Portia’s and Lucrece’s emulations expand that paradoxical agency to an even greater extent, leaving the entirety of the rhetoric and agency in a strange space where it simultaneously challenges and supports the society it protects. Their ends are clearly good, but challenging social norms—symbolically accompanied by the tragedies of their deaths—may not be wholly legitimate means within the cultural contexts to which they ascribe.

This paradoxical agency grounds even Volumnia’s rhetoric. As mentioned in the introduction, her first few lines encapsulate many of the issues facing female speakers in the Roman works while beginning to establish shameful consequence for her son and his legacy:

You have said you will not grant us anything—  
For we have nothing else to ask but that  
Which you deny already. Yet we will ask,  
That, if you fail in our request, the blame  
May hang upon your hardness. Therefore hear us.  
(*Coriolanus* 5.3.88-92)

Unfortunately, like every other deliberative speaker, the persuasive power Volumnia holds ultimately relies on the willingness of others to accept and act upon those words.

Volumnia and the other Roman women must first be heard in order to effect anything, and once their speeches are done, they must hope that their auditors take the advised action. Actual agency lies in the hands of the auditor, and the woman's civic contribution remains limited to advising. Volumnia overcomes these disadvantages because she is a very persistent, knowledgeable, and persuasive advisor with an *ethos* that she will not sacrifice for a man's alibi<sup>17</sup> or for any other purpose. Still, Volumnia's unique circumstances add another element to the ethical discussion: even here, while she "pleads," she in fact insists on being heard, and her "therefore hear us" reads more as a demand than a request. This introduces an ethical issue particular to the relationship between Coriolanus and Volumnia: does her influence over him deny him the freedom to choose? This issue highlights what Crider calls "the one principle fundamental to an ethics of rhetoric—human freedom" (144). Depending on how we read Volumnia's control of Coriolanus, her demand could deny him his freedom, but his repeated attempts to leave throughout the speech and refusal of a private audience indicate that he retains the agency to choose, at least until the very end of her speech.

Although her rhetoric possibly reaches its own ethical breaking point, Volumnia's means could be legitimate if her own motivations are. Dollimore's statement that she "conceives of *virtus* not as essence but as political strategy" supports the possibility that what seems to be ethically questionable is in fact ethically coherent within her understanding of her culture (218). Typically, we think of cultural values as something clearly signified and understood, but the culture of Rome, which integrates military service and political positions, confuses its own values. Cicero attempts to correct this

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<sup>17</sup> Refer to p.65; See also Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare* 19.

issue with *On Obligations*, but even he cannot wholly reconcile the two incarnations of honor within Roman culture. On a certain level, Coriolanus is the embodiment of idealistic *honestum* and his mother, pragmatic *utile*; Coriolanus's absolutism is the result of Volumnia teaching *honestum* without the moderation of the *utile* (Correl 34-35), and the result demonstrates the ethical issues that arise when either side is taken to an extreme. Either way, Volumnia's threats are the last things we hear her say. The ensuing death of her son prove that her rhetorical success does not come without cost, and her silence while the men of Rome name her its "patroness" reinforces the fact that men ultimately define women's roles and their signification within Roman society.

If fate itself cannot allow either ethical rhetoric to succeed or transgressive rhetoric to go "unpunished," then is there truly an ethical rhetoric, any form of agency, that women can employ without sacrifice? The truth of the matter is that while most, if not all, of these women's tactics are ethical and wholly justifiable, their actions are interpreted by men throughout history whose perspective on what is necessary and justified differs. The state itself empowers women to be agents of social order and correction, and they are powerful agents even within the limits of the domestic sphere; however, they are still inscribed within the social order they support and thus are subject to its judgments.

#### CHAPTER 4. ETHICS OF RHETORICAL PERFORMANCE FOR THE NON-ROMAN WOMAN

Against the complex spectrum of Roman female speakers, Shakespeare provides us with two non-Roman women, Tamora and Cleopatra. Both women are outsiders in a Roman world, and their actions repeatedly subvert and challenge Roman norms. Their “Otherness” is apparent in the source of their rhetorical authority, one absent a virtuous *ethos*: these women persuade and shame through political power, cunning, and sexuality. Tamora and Cleopatra are an empress and a queen, respectively, and their influence is reinforced by rhetorically or sexually subordinating emperors and triumvirs to their wills: this domination of men ensures their agency and rhetorical ends in a patriarchal world. The non-Roman women are also different in their rhetorical priorities: they favor personal desire over civic duty and theatricality over sincerity. These differences in means and motivation provide crucial points of contrast between ethical and unethical female rhetoric in the Roman plays and *The Rape of Lucrece*.

Citizenship—or the lack thereof—is an important factor in Tamora’s and Cleopatra’s rhetoric. As non-Romans, both women are free of Rome’s gendered restrictions, but, in turn, they lack the *ethos* associated with the virtuous Roman woman. On the one hand, Tamora’s transition from Other to empress demonstrates her audience’s naïve belief in the conferral of virtue through citizenship, but Tamora also understands Romans and *romanitas* well enough to perform the persona of a virtuous Roman woman. On the other hand, Cleopatra’s variegated performances illustrate the power of rhetoric and *ethos* completely unbound from the norms of Roman rhetoric and citizenship. Both women create personae suitable to their various audiences and rhetorical situations, but these personae are often quite different from the women’s motivating *ethos*. The result is

an ethical conflict between *seeming* and *being* and the sincerity Cicero and Aristotle associated with ethical rhetoric (*On Oratory* 2.45-46; *On Rhetoric* 1378a). According to Donald Freeman, performative authenticity is thematically central to *Antony and Cleopatra*, which is “dominated by the physical action of seeing and its subtextual metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING—and about the unreliability of both” (446); this reading holds true for *Titus Andronicus* as well, although it presents in slightly different form. Tamora and Cleopatra demonstrate the unreliability of seeing because—in line with Judith Butler’s theory of performativity—they rhetorically manipulate the signifiers of various stereotypical female subjects to assume expedient personae.

Tamora and Cleopatra’s rhetorical performances prove the tenuousness of Rome’s reliance on ethical rhetoric: the shared public interest in maintaining *romanitas* and *virtus* holds Roman society together. When the *honestum* and *utile* clash or when characters undermine the sincerity of rhetorical performance, the very fabric of Roman society begins to shred. Scott Crider and Joel Altman explore this problem through *Othello*’s Iago, who, like Tamora and Cleopatra, demonstrates the fine line between mere seeming and sincerity. Although Kathryn Schwarz outlines a critical history in which the performance of virtue creates a “convergence of ... meaning” between “seeming” and “being” (*What You Will* 99-100), by which “... women who choose to seem may be no better than they should be, but they may be no worse” (101), Tamora and Cleopatra’s rhetorical performances illustrate the limitations of that convergence. When *seeming* serves an unethical purpose in rhetoric, it proves the lie of the perceived virtue: a temporary good for unethical ends is merely an illegitimate means to a greater, unethical

end, just as Antony's funeral speech is unethical even while it seeks a good in honoring Caesar (Crider 61).

Despite the predominantly unethical means and ends of Tamora's and Cleopatra's rhetoric—both within and without Rome's rhetorical and gendered limitations—the women's rhetorical performances attempt to find ways of transcending the limitations of traditionally “feminine” rhetorical performances. It is through their theatricality and performance of non-normative roles that Tamora and Cleopatra demonstrate the ethical and unethical potential for superseding the presupposed boundaries of female rhetoric and its associated forms of signification.

### **Words for a “Queen of Beasts”: Unethical Rhetoric<sup>18</sup>**

For the majority of *Titus Andronicus* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, Tamora and Cleopatra are unethical rhetors who employ illegitimate means to seek their own good; however, their refusal to follow ethical guidelines for rhetoric and decorous female behavior demonstrates the tremendous power of unfettered female rhetoric. Aristotle notes that “correct,” effective rhetoric is by no means necessarily ethical (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1142b15-20), and these non-Roman women prove it. Their performances stand in line with Iago's, of which Crider states that “unethical rhetoric can be highly pleasurable to observe, but only as long as we forget that the end the power is achieving is not a good one” (101). Tamora and Cleopatra both engage in performances that are pleasing to their audiences through seeming virtue and concern for the auditors' well-being; meanwhile, the plays' audiences are simultaneously pleased by the rhetorical skill behind such rhetoric, ethical or not. This rhetoric takes advantage of uniquely female influence and

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<sup>18</sup> The “Queen of Beasts” heading owes credit to the late Colleen McCollough's *Antony & Cleopatra*, published by Simon and Schuster, 2008.

steps beyond the limitations of the “chaste” rhetoric of other Roman women, even Volumnia’s ethically troubling rhetoric of motherhood. Ultimately, cultural and ethical differences result in the Romans referring to Tamora as a “ravenous tiger” (Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus* 5.3.194), and they brand Cleopatra a “whore” (Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra* 3.6.67); these Othered and often unethical female performances set loose signifiers that become illegible once the audience sees through the theatrical illusion.

For all the demonization of Tamora, she does not start the play as an unethical or performatively illegible speaker. Her first rhetorical performance of *Titus Andronicus* is the epitome of chaste female rhetoric, but her son’s death and the perceived “betrayal” of the ethical audience by Titus drive her into an unethical quest for revenge. Although Tamora may seem justified initially, her ends and means are inherently problematic (Hiles 234). For Renaissance audiences, “a mother seeking to avenge her son is to some extent an allowed role, motherhood being a destined livery and revenge a wild kind of justice” (Kehler 325), but Tamora goes beyond justice in her quest for revenge. Aristotle states that it is better to suffer injustice, because “doing injustice is worse; for it is blameworthy” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1138a30), and Tamora does injustice by emulating and exceeding the worst of Titus’s twisted “justice” in Alarbus’s sacrifice. In order to achieve these larger ends, however, Tamora must engage in a variety of rhetorical performances that are similarly unethical in both ends and means.

Once Tamora gains the position and power of the Roman empress, she embodies the ethical problem of *seeming* rather than *being* virtuous. In her first public act, Tamora establishes a persona that—on the surface—exemplifies the Roman and rhetorical ideals so far unrealized in the play. In open discourse, she speaks with an attitude of



moderation, sympathy, and humility, and she configures Titus's civic duty as more important than personal vendettas, thereby placing the *utile* above the *honestum* and advising Saturninus to a more politic—and politically sound—course of action:

My worthy lord, if ever Tamora  
Were gracious in those princely eyes of thine,  
Then hear me speak indifferently for all,  
And at my suit, sweet, pardon what is past" (*Titus  
Andronicus* 1.1.436-9).

Despite her flattery—already a step into unethical territory—her authority is tenuous; Saturninus angrily rejects her plea (1.1.440-1), but she recovers and overcomes his own unethical response by appealing to the Ciceronian order of obligations (*On Obligations* 1.45): “gods of Rome forbend / I should be author to dishonor you” (*Titus Andronicus* 1.1.442-3). The falsehood behind this vow becomes quickly evident in her assignation with Aaron the following day, but for her Roman audience she seems to be a woman of virtue, respect, and piety.

Tamora advances this persona and its false *ethos* by making claim to Roman citizenship and advising Saturninus in a way akin to Castiglione's courtier. Her marriage has made her “incorporate in Rome, / A Roman now adopted happily” who “must therefore advise the Emperor for his good” (*Titus Andronicus* 1.1.459-61). Through wedlock, she is a part of Rome according to the metonymy often found in royal speech, but she is also ostensibly now a Roman citizen, her Otherness erased and replaced with dedication to her new country and its people. Indeed, she appears to fulfill this role well, gently shaming Saturninus for selfish, unmerciful behavior: “Lose not so noble a friend on vain suppose, / Nor with sour looks afflict his gentle heart” (1.1.448-9). She similarly advises and reprimands Bassianus, an act which further demonstrates her diplomacy as

well as her power (1.1.465-7). Her ability to navigate the cultural values and political necessities of the moment make her seem a perfect empress.

Within the very same speech, however, Tamora reveals the true *ethos* behind her superficially ethical rhetoric: she manipulates the social circumstances and expectations of her various audiences all for the sake of revenge. As she states in her aside to Saturninus, she pursues an end entirely different from her deliberative goal of peace and reconciliation. In order to achieve this, she must convince Saturninus to “be ruled” (*Titus Andronicus* 1.1.450). As in the way Volumnia asks Coriolanus to ignore his distaste for the plebs, Tamora asks her new husband to emulate her behavior, to “dissemble” his feelings as she does (1.1.452); however, while Volumnia ultimately seeks a potential good for her son, herself, and Rome—even if she is mistaken in presuming her son’s consulship as a good end for all three—Tamora knowingly pursues a mutual end that is unethical, with no concern for the greater good. Tamora provides Saturninus with logical reasons for delayed gratification, such as his insecure reign, “newly planted” and easily “supplanted” by unhappy Romans (1.1.453, 456). More effective than any logic, however, are her *pathos* and *ethos*. Carolyn Asp states that

Tamora’s language is effective not only because she rules over men who are in a “son-like” relation to her but because her language is connected with direct emotive states—the sources of her power are the twin drives of aggressive revenge and narcissistic sensual pleasure. She has the ability to create emotive states in others through her use of highly descriptive, evocative, even poetic language. (339)

Tamora’s simple metaphors comparing Saturninus to new vegetation are but a small example of her imagery; she also appeals to his hatred of the Andronici with words like “massacre” and “raze” (*Titus Andronicus* 1.1.459-60). More impressive than her imagery, however, is her performance of a variety of female signifiers that inspire both lust and

trust. She makes appeals that are simultaneously erotic and maternal: she speaks of his “princely eyes” (1.1.437), calls him her “sweet” (1.1.439), and claims that “[s]he will a handmaid be to his desire, / A loving nurse, a mother to his youth” (1.1.338-9). Kehler states, “A testament to Tamora’s beauty and code-transgressing power is her control over her young husband ... the difference in their years both hints at incest and poses a threat to male dominance” (322). The combination of usurpation, symbolic incest, and deliberately sensual persuasion makes Tamora’s rhetoric undeniably powerful but entirely unethical, and her complete corruption of the emperor presages her corruption of Rome itself. She signifies the destructive mother of whom the fears about female vice and the downfall of family and state abounded.

Tamora’s public performance of Roman virtue and private control of the emperor are the lynchpins of her rhetorical and political power within Rome: so long as she can maintain the Romans’ trust, she can maintain her agency. Her ability to publically perform the ideal, virtuous female speaker gives her significant influence and power. This persona, supported by the power of her position and Roman tradition, allows Tamora to begin her revenge moments after her ascension. She promises Saturninus that the Andronici shall “know what ‘tis to let a queen / Kneel in the streets and beg for grace in vain” (*Titus Andronicus* 1.1.463-4), and within a mere fifty lines, she has her enemies kneeling for forgiveness, even if they do not yet know that their actions are “in vain.” The instant success of her manipulative and deceptive rhetoric proves the potential of unethical persuasion.

Cleopatra similarly achieves her ends through evocative language and manipulating powerful men, but the contexts and intentions behind her unethical rhetoric

differ from Tamora's. Where Tamora manipulates Roman men within the confines of Roman values and interests, Cleopatra attempts to draw her male auditors away from Rome: she is capable of turning Roman values to her own purposes, but she is at her strongest when the values of her Egyptian world foreground her arguments. Her *ethos* and values, which glorify personal desire and feeling above Rome's Stoicism and civic duty, play to her theatricality. That theatricality creates a wide range of personae, and that performative mutability—her ability to *seem* to be or feel whatever is rhetorically necessary—is the crux of her rhetorical influence. Strangely enough, it is in this changeableness that she is most true to herself. This seems contradictory, but Antony testifies to its truth:

Fie, wrangling queen!  
Whom everything becomes—to chide, to laugh,  
To weep; whose every passion fully strives  
To make itself, in thee, fair and admired. (*Antony and  
Cleopatra* 1.1.56-59)

She is argumentative, scolding, and emotional, and yet none of these are negative qualities from Antony's point of view: his feelings for her make all aspects of her inconstant character desirable, and that attractiveness demonstrates how Cleopatra's rhetorical effectiveness over Antony relies on "dominating his emotions" (Wolf 329). While Rome's women face contradictory expectations of chastity in return for paradoxical agency, Cleopatra is a paradox by nature: she is constant in her inconstancy, and her insincere performances for the sake of love make her unethical performances appear ethical, especially in the face of the Romans' own moral failures in the play.

Tamora and Cleopatra alike rely on illegitimate means to achieve their ends, but, unlike Saturninus, Chiron, and Demetrius, Antony cannot simply "be ruled" with a

maternal *ethos* or *persona*; thus, Cleopatra's rhetorical performances must charm or shame him in a way that leaves him the illusion of autonomy. She achieves this effect by manipulating Antony's affections, his self-interest, and his pride. When faced with the possibility that Antony might return to Rome, she convinces him to stay, not by pleading or begging but by playing herself contrary to his expectations. In the process, she shames him for obedience to a shrewish wife who represents the overbearing power and demands of Rome herself. To prepare, she seeks information about her audience's mood, and plans her performance accordingly: "If you find him sad, / Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report / That I am sudden sick" (1.3.4-6). Her approach to rhetorical performance is a conscious change in behavior for the purposes of persuasive potential. In fact, she even announces "I am sick and sullen" (1.3.16), perhaps to make sure that her ladies Charmian and Iras are clear on the "act." Her performance at this point is entirely geared toward inspiring *pathos* and manipulating the shame Antony already feels at having to tell her that he is leaving. Lucrece and many of the other Roman women demonstrate the impact of delivery in rhetorical performance, and Lucrece even practices this delivery with her apostrophes to fate and time and her ecphrastic description of the painting of Troy; however, Lucrece simply seeks the means to articulate an interior truth, while Cleopatra seeks to articulate the image she thinks Antony needs to see—not what she actually feels in the moment but what will be most moving to him. The line between sincere performance and theatrical display is a thin one, and it is the primary ethical failure of Cleopatra's typical speech.

Cleopatra also treads unethical ground in her use of shame. The Roman women employ shame as a social corrective: their goal is to support the greater good and the

good of the state, and, although this may not be a direct good for herself or her auditor, it is ethical in its service of a Roman citizen's higher obligations. In contrast, the Egyptian queen uses shame and sarcasm to undermine Antony's reality. She turns what is right by Roman standards into something shameful. In some ways, her reconfiguration of Rome's demands is not without justification, but her method—humiliating Antony—lacks an ethical foundation, particularly because it disguises her management of Antony's actions and decisions. For example, Cleopatra acknowledges Antony's desire to resist Rome, but she belittles his decision to abide by Rome's demands:

You must not stay here longer; your dismissal  
Is come from Caesar. Therefore hear it, Antony.  
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Call in the messengers. As I am Egypt's queen,  
Thou blushest, Antony; and that blood of thine  
Is Caesar's homager: else so thy cheek pays shame  
When shrill-tongued Fulvia scolds. (*Antony and Cleopatra*  
1.3.29-37)

She treats the arrival of a messenger as a sign of Antony's complete submission to Rome and Fulvia, and she reads his blush of anger or embarrassment as proof of her claim. Her goal is for Antony to reject the messenger outright and choose to stay with her, and it is a testament to her knowledge of her audience and the skill of her performance that she knows how to manipulate him by making his domestic and political obligations grating insults to his pride and agency. She shames him by claiming his presence in Egypt is merely by his wife's command—"... says the married woman you may go?" (1.3.24-5)—and her accusations are biting, especially given Plutarch's context for the relationships between Antony, Fulvia, and Cleopatra: "... Cleopatra was to give Fulvia thanks for that she had taught Antonius this obedience to women, that learned so well to be at their

commandment” (1671). Cleopatra acts the shrew but plays Antony’s victim, hurt by his weakness and indecisiveness in the face of his overbearing Roman obligations.

Crider states that ethical rhetoric requires the freedom of the auditor to choose and act (79); Volumnia treads a fine line with her son in this regard, and so does Cleopatra. She manages to convince Antony to the course of action she desires while making it seem his own decision, and she does so by shaming him into the course of action she desires. When Antony declares that he will not leave Egypt or her, Cleopatra rejects his claim as insincere and proof of his inconstancy:

Excellent falsehood!  
Why did he marry Fulvia, and not love her?  
I’ll seem the fool I am not. Antony  
Will be himself. (*Antony and Cleopatra* 1.1.42-45)

She attacks his sincerity by questioning his oath of marriage to Fulvia, expanding that “falsehood” to apply to everything else. Her *ethos* as queen is apparent in her assertiveness, but she also performs a virtuous *ethos* by assuming a moral high ground and conveniently ignoring her own role in Antony’s broken vows. In fact, these four lines form a sort of reversed, fallacious syllogism: because Antony made vows of love he did not mean or could not keep, he is inconstant; because Antony is inconstant, Cleopatra would be a fool to accept his protestations of love; and because Cleopatra is not a fool, she cannot accept his claim. From the point of view she presents, Antony’s obedience to Rome’s summons proves him to be the weak, domineered man she has invented; unable to counter her black-or-white, *ad hominem* argument, Antony must rebel against Rome—as she wants him to—or else he proves her correct and cements her accusations, making the seemingly weak and submissive Antony the reality.

Cleopatra's attack on Antony's character is perhaps even more of an ethical failure than her insincere performances. She manipulates his torn loyalties between her and Rome and takes advantage of his weakened self-confidence as a man of honor and *romanitas*, qualities which have defined his life but grow increasingly incompatible with his personal desires. Her rhetoric strikes many of the same chords as Volumnia's, but, while Volumnia's criticism of Coriolanus is balanced by concern for the greater good, Cleopatra's rhetoric has no such balance: her ends serve no greater good other than her own. This mix of personal interest and theatrics make her rhetoric unethical by the standards of classical rhetoric, yet her actions are not all that different from that of the male Romans in the play: Antony and Caesar both manipulate others—especially Octavia—for the sake of their personal ambitions. This Rome is not Cicero's ethical empire, in which civic obligation rules, but rather a world of the *honestum* and ambition pursued at all costs. The Romans' claim to sincerity and public interest is no less a matter of seeming than Cleopatra's theatrics.

Cleopatra and Tamora also display unethical rhetoric by creating false evidence and performing emotions that they do not feel in order to create *pathos*. Tamora displays this skill best when confronted by Bassianus and Lavinia in the woods, a moment which “mark[s] her as expert in the rhetoric of duplicity” (Kehler 324). As soon as Demetrius and Chiron arrive, Tamora assumes the *ethos* of an innocent victim, casting the Romans as murderous attackers and the setting—which she had described mere lines earlier as a romantic retreat (*Titus Andronicus* 2.3.10-29)—as a dark and frightening part of the forest:

A barren, detested vale you see it is;  
The trees, though summer, yet forlorn and lean,



Overcome with moss and baleful mistletoe.  
Here never shines the sun, here nothing breeds  
Unless the nightly owl or fatal raven,  
And when they showed me this abhorred pit  
They told me here at dead time of the night  
A thousand fiends, a thousand hissing snakes,  
Ten thousand swelling toads, as many urchins  
Would make such fearful and confused cries  
As any mortal body hearing it  
Should straight fall mad or else die suddenly. (2.3.93-104)

Tamora's imagery creates the mood of a "melodramatic horror" (Asp 338), but even the structure of her speech—the occasional enjambment and alternately rambling or fragmented sentences—evokes a sense of fear or panic. This speech also bears a multivalent duality beyond the presentation of falsehood as truth: in fact, the lies themselves are a carefully reconstructed version of previous events that demonstrate Tamora's virtuosic rhetorical ability. The breeding owl and raven are Tamora and Aaron, whom Lavinia called Tamora's "raven-colored love" (*Titus Andronicus* 2.3.83). She speaks of their intention to leave her bound "unto the body of a dismal yew" for a "miserable death" (2.3.107-8), which could refer either wholly or in euphemistic synecdoche to Aaron and the "petit mort" of sexual climax. Furthermore, the "hellish tale" Lavinia and Bassianus might tell would indeed result in Tamora's downfall or death (105); the fiends, snakes, toads, and urchins could be understood as the Romans speaking of her adultery and treachery. Christopher Crosbie describes how her reinscription of this space "aligns Tamora with Aristotle's blameworthy liar who deceives even 'where nothing is at stake.' For neither expediency nor strategic calculation renders a fictitious excuse necessary" (161-2). To speak the truth as a lie in metaphor is a remarkable rhetorical feat, but it is frightening proof of reality's susceptibility to rhetorical art, particularly at the hands of an unethical speaker.

Cleopatra also creates her own truths through evocative language and constructed emotions, all with the intention of manipulating Antony. She speaks in epic form, alluding to myth and legend, in order to add intensity and import to her interpretation of Antony's actions. Hyperbole dominates her claims when she states that "never was there a queen / So mightily betrayed" by Antony (*Antony and Cleopatra* 1.3.30), who "in swearing shake the thronèd gods" with his supposedly false vows of love for her (1.3.35). She continues with these extremes in order to attack Antony's legendary reputation through contrast and antistasis:

Eternity was in our lips and eyes,  
Bliss in our brows' bent; none our parts so poor  
But was a race of heaven. They are so still,  
Or thou, the greatest soldier of the world  
Art turned the greatest liar. (1.3.44-48)

These lines evoke shame over Antony's failure to be faithful, and equating that failure with a loss of both his military reputation and a sort of romantic immortality.

Cleopatra continues in this vein, acting out distress while fallaciously demanding that Antony accept the burden of proof in a situation where, in truth, it is entirely unnecessary. Antony attempts to assuage Cleopatra when he states that Fulvia is dead, and therefore he cannot be leaving Cleopatra to be with his Roman wife. In response, Cleopatra twists his claim into yet another trap, in which he proves himself inconstant, faithless, and unloving one way or another:

O, most false love!  
Where be the sacred vials thou shouldst fill  
With sorrowful water? Now I see, I see,  
In Fulvia's death, how mine received shall be. (*Antony and Cleopatra* 1.3.175-8)

With false equivalency, Cleopatra shames Antony for being inconstant and demands a burden of proof that is not only unreasonable given their history but also emasculating. Even her performance mocks him, as she cries out for Charmian to loosen her bodice and immediately remands her order, because “I am quickly ill and well; / So Antony loves” (1.3.86-7). By acting out negative female stereotypes in a blatantly contrived performance, she sets herself above them while ascribing them to her auditor. This attack on constancy and sincerity reaches its peak when Cleopatra demands that he “play” the part of which she falsely accuses him, and this demand accuses him of the unethical performance she is currently practicing:

I prithee turn aside and weep for her,  
Then bid adieu to me, and say the tears  
Belong to Egypt. Good now, play one scene  
Of excellent dissembling, and let it look  
Like perfect honor. (1.3.92-6)

Cleopatra’s request for a performance compares to Volumnia’s demand that Coriolanus play to the plebeians for the sake of political advancement; however, while Volumnia intends it as a pragmatic act of a rhetorical man, Cleopatra means only to shame Antony as the opposite of an honorable Roman man. She portrays herself as an authority on virtue and faithfulness, and she uses that persona to devalue Antony’s professions of love as not just lies, but pathetic ones. The least he could do, in her estimation, is pretend constancy in his marriage to Fulvia and follow it with a polite white lie for the queen whom he merely pretends to love: he is no true Roman, but he could at least act like one. Her humiliating accusations evoke both shame and anger, all to manipulate Antony—and his attitude towards Rome—according to her will.

The greatest artistry in Cleopatra's manipulation, however, is her ability to maintain Antony's affection, despite him knowing that she has been playing him the entire time (*Antony and Cleopatra* 1.3.92-4). After all her brutal attacks, Cleopatra once more reasserts the *pathos* of the abandoned but still faithful lover. She claims that she lives to please him and begs his forgiveness, "since," as she says, "my becomings kill me when they do not / Eye well to you" (1.3.97-8). In addition, she retracts her previous accusations and instead blesses Antony's journey and encourages him to be constant against her emotional influence:

Your honor calls you hence;  
Therefore be deaf to my unpitied folly,  
And all the gods go with you. Upon your sword  
Sit laurel victory, and smooth success  
Be strewed before your feet. (1.3.98-102)

Without Antony's response that their love remains intact, it would be easy to interpret Cleopatra's lines as sarcasm; instead, we are encouraged to see Cleopatra successfully perform like a "proper Roman woman" in her self-effacing goodwill. Interestingly, this moment reveals that the true end of her rhetoric aims not at manipulating Antony to stay in Egypt but rather at testing his devotion. Her speech is still unethical in its means and its self-serving ends, but it offers a different perspective on unethical rhetoric than the blatantly evil speech of Tamora or even the questionably ambitious speech of Volumnia. It is strange to think of Cleopatra as insecure, and yet her need for reassurance resurfaces when she obsesses over Antony's marriage to Octavia. In a way, her insecurity over Antony's devotion makes her changeableness—and all of her performances—surprisingly sincere; from that perspective, her rhetoric may still be unethical, but only in means rather than in whole.

Whether or not Cleopatra's performance with Antony is sincere, she is still the consummate performer, whose rhetoric, as mentioned previously, ultimately serves her own purposes and no other's. Even in the throes of grief she can maintain whatever persona the situation requires. For example, she plays the majestic, grieving queen to manipulate Dolabella into betraying Caesar's confidence. Through a description of Antony that relies on hyperbolic imagery and *pathos*, she inspires a sense of reverence, not just of Antony but of herself. She blends these techniques with her very real sorrow at Antony's death; in doing so, she moves her auditor to pity her and thus give her information she desires. As Goldman states,

She has succeeded by commanding his mood, impressing him with her greatness and the greatness of her grief .... More specifically, she has won him by a report of Antony's greatness, an immense speech of praise which, even more than Enobarbus' report, has been a work of the imagination, an elaborate hyperbolic portrait, measuring Antony by the world and, finally, by the limits not only of nature but of imagination itself. (253)

Dolabella is indeed moved, enough so that he reveals the truth behind Caesar's beautiful promises: regardless of any agreements, Cleopatra will be presented as a trophy in his triumph. The fascinating thing about this persuasion is that Cleopatra achieves it without the use of deliberative or judicial rhetoric. Delivered as an encomium and based entirely in her own subjectivity, the speech demonstrates the immense power of her performance, language, and ability to read and move an audience.

Cleopatra's dominance of mood recalls Asp's claim to Tamora's similar ability. Asp states that Tamora induces specific "emotive states," namely "aggressive revenge and narcissistic sensual pleasure" (339), and although she successfully plays the merciful Roman empress, she cannot create and play other personae with Cleopatra's skill. For

this reason, although Tamora is adept in her rhetoric, she fails in her final attempt to manipulate Titus, and the irony of her failure highlights the ethical failure of her quest for revenge. As stated previously, Tamora constructs her *ethos* out of a maternal persona and an appearance of female Roman virtue—as the gentle, forgiving, mediating voice—with the added authority of imperial power. The symbolism of Tamora as Revenge echoes her revision of the vale in 2.3. Once more she makes one thing seem like another; in this case, she appears as an agent of Titus’s revenge rather than the agent working against him. By this time, however, Titus has discovered her role in his family’s destruction, and the illusion of her imperial persona is as transparent as her current disguise. Indeed, Tamora fails so completely that Titus is able to turn the unethical goals of her rhetoric against her, and the core of that failure is the trope accompanying all the female rhetorical failures in Shakespeare’s Rome: misreading the audience. Tamora assumes that Titus’s madness is real and completely debilitating; therefore, she dismisses his repetitions of recognition and revenge: “Misinterpreting the evidence, she wrongly surmises that Titus is unable to separate literal from allegorical . . . . Although she tries to treat Titus as a credulous ‘child,’ Tamora is unable to ‘maternalize’ her power in this scene, and she is eventually defeated by her own rhetorical skill” (Asp 341-2). By condescendingly underestimating Titus, she commits an ethical and rhetorical failure. She does not even attempt to persuade Titus but simply assumes that what she says will be believed without question. For so much of the play, Tamora’s rhetoric has made *seeming* into a believable illusion, but that success leads her to take the power and influence of her words and actions for granted. This is the crux of Tamora’s failure: the unethical use of her power and rhetoric has corrupted her awareness of rhetoric’s—and her own—limitations.

Of course, Cleopatra's rhetoric has its limits too: her performances only work when her audience is not certain of the performance's contrived nature. As an unethical speaker, Cleopatra is a theatrically appealing version of the Machiavellian orator, and her pragmatic self-interest is matched only by Octavius Caesar. Both characters are consummate performers for whom the ends justify the means. Her first meeting with Caesar is a calculated performance of pure pragmatism for the sake of her own honor and self-preservation. As such, Roman gender stereotypes and rhetorical clichés dominate her speech:

Sole sir o' th' world,  
I cannot project mine own cause so well  
To make it clear, but do confess I have  
Been laden with like frailties which before  
Have often shamed our sex. (*Antony and Cleopatra*  
5.2.149-54)

She begins with flattery and quickly turns to false humility in playing the submissive "Roman" woman. Her humble and deceptive claim to poor speech is accompanied by a failure to maintain the iambic rhythm perfectly employed in the other lines, and that imperfect meter subtly adds charming proof to her words. The apology that follows allows her to excuse any past wrongdoing against Caesar as nothing more than the folly of a weak, stereotypical woman. It thus validates Caesar's own performance of nobility and mercy.

Cleopatra plays an innocent fool, aware that Caesar does not intend to keep his promises; meanwhile Caesar is aware of her pretense of submission, which he indicates in his threat about the consequences of suicide (*Antony and Cleopatra* 5.2.160-3). The revelation of Caesar's conscious participation in this masquerade invites us to further question the ethics of rhetoric in the play's world of political expedience and personal

honor. It is difficult to condemn Cleopatra for unethical rhetoric when Octavius is just as guilty. Although *Titus Andronicus* begins on similar grounds, Tamora's brutality quickly outstrips the faults of the Romans whose actions instigate the revenge plot. In contrast, Cleopatra appears *amoral* rather than *immoral*: she is not ethical by Roman standards because she offers an alternative outside of Rome's purview. It is not necessarily a better world, but it highlights the hypocrisy of Rome's supposed ethics in how it rewards—if not demands—ambition and the pursuit of political power.

### **“In her strong toil of grace”: Performative Power and Transcendent Femininity**

Every woman in Shakespeare's Rome performs her gender and her virtue, but those performances are often undermined by the ever-present mistrust of female virtue and the cultural subordination of the female sex. Volumnia, Portia, and Lucrece attempt to overcome and subvert these trends by emulating male performances of *virtus* and *romanitas*; of the three, Volumnia is the most successful because of her unique *ethos* as a widowed mother and an acclaimed voice of both male and female virtue. In addition, Volumnia symbolizes Rome herself, and thus she becomes the voice of Rome. Although she appears to transcend the limitations of the female role in Roman society, Volumnia is still trapped in its paradox: she transgresses the limitations of her social norms only to strengthen them and—ultimately—return to them. Tamora and Cleopatra offer alternative forms of political and moral authority, without the limiting end of sustaining Rome's status quo. In the process, they have a possible avenue for permanently transcending female restrictions and stereotypes.

At the beginning of *Titus Andronicus*, Tamora works with the Roman system and attempts to follow its rules of both rhetoric and decorum; however, this speech is notably



unsuccessful in dissuading Titus from sacrificing her son. Her performance is reminiscent of Lucrece's plea to Tarquin, particularly her insistence on Titus's nobility and her appeal that mercy is akin to godliness. Indeed, Tamora's first appeal borders on flattery when she addresses Titus as her "gracious conqueror, / Victorious Titus" (Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus* 1.1.104-5). This is reinforced at the end with "thrice-noble Titus" (1.1.120)—"thrice" merciful for sparing her life and the lives of her two younger sons. Tamora then presents mercy as a path to godliness when she asks Titus, "Wilt thou draw near the nature of the gods? / Draw near them then in being merciful. / Sweet mercy is nobility's true badge" (1.1.117-9). Here, her rhetoric constructs the *ethos* she desires Titus to enact—that of the "gracious conqueror"—just as many of the other Roman women have done, rhetorically constructing the ideal man whom their male auditors should emulate. She attempts to establish an *ethos* of reason, fairness, and motherhood in spite of her status as a Goth and prisoner, but it is insufficient: Titus's prejudice of difference is too great, and, thus, she cannot muster the authority or *pathos* to convince him.

Once Tamora becomes empress, she rises above the limitations of a normal woman and the prejudices against a non-Roman; as a result, she gains considerable rhetorical freedom and agency, along with the leverage to destroy Rome from within. The power of this position grants her an almost unbelievable, assumed *ethos* of credibility and authority within the play, yet the associated persona of the good-natured empress is a precarious one: despite her political power and rhetorical ability, she must perform the Roman female ideal in order to maintain her public influence. Unfortunately, even imperial power does not entirely excuse her from the ethical and performative limitations of *seeming* Roman; therefore, she attempts to create a new persona of even greater

agency, Revenge. In attempting to transcend the limitations of femininity and the female sex in Rome, Tamora attempts to control Titus through the means of his revenge. As stated previously, her efforts fail, and she eventually finds herself dead at the hands of the Romans who now lead her native people in war against her. The extremes of her unethical behavior do not result in a transcendence of Roman norms but rather an utter failure to create a sustainable ethics of rhetoric outside of it, and this failure is ultimately dehumanizing. Although the metaphorical connection to animals begins with Lavinia's earlier speech in the woods, the Romans reassert Tamora's final "persona" as little more than a beast in human—or Roman—clothing:

As for that ravenous tiger, Tamora,  
... throw her forth to beasts and birds to prey.  
Her life was beastly and devoid of pity,  
And being dead, let birds on her take pity. (*Titus  
Andronicus* 5.3.194-9)

Purely unethical rhetoric—speech that denies a culturally shared definition of virtue for the sake of revenge—may grant persuasive power, but relies on a tenuously held persona of the humanity it threatens. Just as Roman women ultimately uphold the restrictions on their own agency, typically unethical rhetoric causes its own eventual downfall.

Where Tamora employs unethical rhetoric throughout *Titus Andronicus*, Cleopatra often walks the gray area of ethical speech demonstrated by Lucrece, Portia, and Volumnia; however, while the Roman women emulate male behaviors in order to rise above the male *ethos*, Cleopatra does not merely emulate but assimilate the best of Rome's rhetorical performances into her own theatrical mode. As Mimi Still Dixon states, Cleopatra's focus on performance allows her to reconstruct female stereotypes into more rhetorically effective personae:

Cleopatra, of course, is the supremely self-conscious object. She exploits her power as visual object with her unrelenting theatrics. Her personal and political strategies depend on the power of theatrical spectacle. She takes the cliché of the femme fatale to such an extreme that it doubles back on itself—returns to her a kind of agency and conscious will that the passive and inscrutable seductress of convention does not have. Whether at Cydnus or in her tomb, she plays to the viewer. (76)

Cleopatra's inconstancy allows her the flexibility to manipulate and persuade any auditor in any mood, and, indeed, her inconstancy is part of her appeal: Joseph Hall's *Characters of Virtues and Vices* in 1608 states that for the inconstant man, "The multitude of his changed purposes brings with it forgetfulness; and not of others more than of himself. He says, swears, renounces; because, what he promised, he meant not long enough to make an impression." Cleopatra, although a woman, seems to create a similar forgetfulness: other characters in the play forget and forgive her faults, tantrums, and failings because they are so fleeting and interspersed with equally fleeting—but perhaps more arresting—moments of benevolence and affection. Enobarbus remarks on the overwhelming appeal of this inconstancy, saying,

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale  
Her infinite variety. Other women cloy  
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry  
Where she most satisfies. For the vilest things  
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests  
Bless her when she is riggish. (*Antony and Cleopatra*  
2.2.240-5)

Cleopatra has numerous faults and makes constant mistakes, yet she commands attention in a way that not even a political alliance or warring wife can, perhaps because she is not subjected or limited by Roman cultural norms.

Although Cleopatra can conform to the behavioral expectations for a Roman woman, the fact that she deliberately chooses not to is what makes her so alluring: her performances give her an agency beyond that of any of the other women. Butler states that “all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; ‘agency,’ then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition” (*Gender Trouble* 145). In other words, Cleopatra’s remarkable agency arises from her “infinite”—yet legible—“variety” within her repetitions and manipulations of female stereotypes. Although political power, sex, and circumstance still affect her agency, Cleopatra’s will is the deciding factor, and it is signified and realized through her theatricality and mutability. For this reason, Cleopatra’s rhetoric offers insight into the ethics guiding decorous female speech, which is entirely dedicated to maintaining women’s supportive, submissive role within a patriarchal society.

Even when her rhetoric aligns with Roman mores, Cleopatra is still simply performing a role: it is her free transition between Roman and non-Roman rhetoric—often with the same auditor—that sets her apart from the Roman women and Tamora as well. Cleopatra cares little for traditional persuasive speech, because the rhetorical power of performance—of *seeming*—is so powerful. In addition, the absence of ill intent for her auditors makes her deceptions mysterious and intriguing rather than evil and despicable. According to Jonathan Gil Harris,

Shakespeare would appear to be reworking a theme found in his earlier comedies: the conflict between female characters as they are perceived by their male counterparts and as they present themselves to their audiences .... What distinguishes *Antony and Cleopatra* from these earlier plays is the way in which it places a question mark next to the ‘reality’ of the Cleopatra whom we are encouraged to dissociate from the projections of her Roman suitors. (423)

The lack of a singularly identifiable performance of “Cleopatra” forces the characters of the play—and the play’s audience—to unify the many Cleopatras into a singularly legible persona, and while this might seem an abdication of control by the rhetor to the audience, her manipulation makes distilling her persona virtually impossible: “Cleopatra’s Egyptian power manifests itself as a spectacle that cannot be fully seen, and that therefore cannot be captured by sight, the Roman vehicle of mastery and empire” (Crane 111). Harris reads Enobarbus’s vague encomium of Cleopatra as evidence of illegibility or invisibility:

... Enobarbus’s nondescription of Cleopatra allow Agrippa to imagine a ‘rare Egyptian!’ (l. 218). Agrippa thus conforms to the law of Roman desire, filling a ‘gap in nature’ with a phantom that compensates for and repudiates Cleopatra’s absence ... she is a food that curiously vanishes at the moment she appears to be most vividly apprehended by her Roman gazers; in effect, she is the ‘vacancy’ that Antony fills with ‘his voluptuousness’ (1.4.26). (418)

This “vacancy” recalls Joseph Hall’s discussion of the inconstant man mentioned in the first chapter of this project. The inconstant man (or woman’s) frequent changes create an absence in the memory, that leaves only the “infinite variety” through which Cleopatra endlessly captivates (*Antony and Cleopatra* 2.2.277): indeed, by making “variety” her signifying repetition, she cannot signify anything other than “Cleopatra”; thus, she *is* whatever she performs, but she can be that which her audience desires or wishes to see.

The fact that we cannot fully see into Cleopatra also affects our perception of her ethics. In the same way that her variety asks her auditors to complete their definition of her, it also requires the play’s audiences to do the same:

Cleopatra remains so perfectly in control of the lines of sight in the play that we can’t really see her for seeing her.

As Mary Ann Bushman says, Cleopatra herself becomes visible—beyond the roles and spectacle—only in a few moments of failed performance, “failed speech” or incompleteness” (40). We glimpse her interiority only in the gaps between performances .... We wait for a soliloquy that doesn’t come. The play “creates in the audience a desire for soliloquy, for a moment of stasis that interrupts the continual role-playing and reflects on it. Yet this desire for soliloquy never gets fulfilled; instead her speeches invite the audience to complete her” (Bushman 40). We have to imagine a Cleopatra. (Dixon 76)

If we accept this reading, Cleopatra reads very similarly to Volumnia, whose singular performance of Roman *pietas* dominates her own play and whose lack of soliloquy and silence at the end of the play leaves her a similar mystery for critics when considering the consequences of her final speech. In contrast, I would argue that the scenes between Cleopatra and her handmaidens provide a small glimpse into her interiority and rhetorical motives, because these women are not only her friends but a literal *part* of her performance: throughout the play, Iras and Charmian help Cleopatra construct her performances. At her death, Iras dies with her, seemingly by mere heartbreak, while Charmian completes Cleopatra’s last line and puts the final touch on the Egyptian Queen’s last performance by adjusting her crown for the perfect image. In essence, Charmian and Iras are a part of *her*, and thus their conversations provide an alternative to soliloquies for exploring Cleopatra’s interior life. In these moments, it becomes clear that Cleopatra’s driving motivations are her love for Antony and her fear of shame at Octavius’s hands, and, against the ethically, culturally, and spiritually vacant Romans, her technically “unethical” rhetoric offers promise of a liveliness and emotional sincerity that Rome’s Stoic, political disavows.

Cleopatra's death is the greatest example of her rhetorical transcendence of Roman ethics and restrictive significations. She begins by emulating the Roman act of suicide as a preventative measure against dishonor:

Look,  
Our lamp is spent; it's out. Good sires, take heart;  
We'll bury him, and then what's brave, what's noble,  
Let's do 't after the high Roman fashion  
And make death proud to take us. (*Antony and Cleopatra*  
4.16.86-90)

Although she recognizes the basic concept and pursues it with a fervor indicated by the trochaic feet of "Let's do 't after the high Roman fashion" (4.15.101), William D. Wolf argues that "she has no idea what the 'Roman fashion' really is in anything, as the method of her death proves" (333). Indeed, Cleopatra's death is as rhetorical, theatrical, and a product of herself as any of her other performances; in that sense, *emulating* Roman suicide becomes *assimilating* its conceptual foundation into a new cultural and rhetorical context. Her assimilation is not without ethical concerns, however, even within a more "Egyptian" frame: her self-centeredness separates her from Antony and costs him both his life and his dignity in a way that undermines the audience's sympathy for her and forgiveness of her non-normative ethics. On this level, her suicide lacks the ethical foundation shared by Lucrece and Portia in their suicides and Portia's self-wounding; however, Octavius threatens her with a permanent re-signification of her *ethos*—as "Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness / I' th' posture of a whore" (*Antony and Cleopatra* 5.2.267-9)—that bears symbolic resemblance to Tarquin's and the Goths' attacks on the virtuous *ethos* of Lucrece and Lavinia, respectively.

Metatheatrical humor aside, Harris comments that "... Cleopatra's reference to the 'squeaking Cleopatra boy' blatantly discloses the artifice of the 'authentic' queen"

(423); however, this artifice is no less real or important to her for its constructed-ness. She is the epitome of the *homo rhetoricus*, whose identity rests in the context of the moment. For this reason, the triumphal parade and its actors will rewrite her performance permanently; in this new, Roman performance, her *ethos*—which is “Cleopatra”— would destroy her “self” more completely than any disfiguring death. Given this threat, it is strange that she precedes her death with the claim that she states,

My resolution’s placed, and I have nothing  
Of woman in me. Now from head to foot  
I am marble-constant. Now the fleeting moon  
No planet is of mine. (*Antony and Cleopatra* 5.2.234-7)

Although this can be read as a rejection of her sex, as so many other women have elided their own in the quest for “masculine” virtues and authority, Cleopatra’s claim cannot be taken out of the context of the play. Always the performer, Cleopatra has played numerous roles and declared her physical or emotional state as a sort of pre-performance ritual that clarifies the role she wishes to play. She has “nothing / Of woman” in her because she is stepping past the strict binary between the virtues of male and female speakers and moving toward the persona—and its associated *ethos*—that she wishes to make her lasting one. In all of Cleopatra’s rhetoric from this point forward, then, suicide is the salvation of her identity as a regal and powerful queen: to “be noble to [herself]” (5.2.230-1), she cannot simply fall on a sword in actual Roman fashion. Indeed, as Kay Stanton remarks, “... Cleopatra eventually realizes that she should not merely imitate but must triumph over Roman militaristic heroism” (108). This is the rhetorical, ethical crux of her suicide.

Like Lucrece’s death, Cleopatra’s suicide asserts both persona and *ethos* against destructive patriarchal influences, but, where Lucrece uses suicide to prove her innocence



and re-enact the crime done against her, Cleopatra uses it to prove her royalty and her ability to assimilate Rome as it could not assimilate her. Even Caesar cannot deny the effectiveness of her performance: in his words, she “looks like sleep, / As she would catch another Antony / In her strong toil of grace” (*Antony and Cleopatra* 5.2.415-17). This regal, peaceful corpse and setting make the traditional Roman suicide appear vulgar in comparison, and her shrewdness and fortitude in constructing such a performance—what seems to be its own kind of “still life”—inspires only respect in Octavius: “Bravest at the last, / She leveled at our purposes and, being royal, / Took her own way” (5.2.400-2). This is emulation at its finest, especially in contrast to Antony’s death, in that she dies in a perfect display of dignity and grace, but, in making it Egyptian in both manner and staging, she assimilates a Roman custom and turns it into something gloriously “Other.” In the process, she cements her *ethos* in such a manner that Caesar’s intentions to shame her in triumph instead turn to memorializing her and Antony with “[h]igh order in [a] great solemnity” (5.2.437).

Contrasted with Tamora’s undignified end, Cleopatra’s final performance escapes all, or at least most, ethical criticism. This is in part perhaps because her cultural difference excuses her from the Christian critique Lucrece faces. Cleopatra’s death also has the strangely ethical element of preventing Octavius from making his lies about her safekeeping from the triumph a reality: she prevents his unethical intentions from becoming an unethical reality. In the end, although she has ulterior motives and ambitions wrapped within this final performance, her reasons for doing so—love and honor—are already those deemed appropriate by the Roman and Greek classics, not to mention the example of Lucrece. Strangely enough, perhaps the most powerful element

in the perception of her suicide is her clarity in her own assertion of it—“what’s brave, what’s noble” (4.16.88). She has no doubt or guilt about her action, instead viewing it as a transcendence resulting in the marriage of two of history’s most well-known lovers (5.2.278-79). Stanton states the achievement of Cleopatra’s suicide in epic proportions:

In her own death, she heroically accomplishes [resurrection and deification] for herself: the collection, recreation, and deification of the multiple components of herself that had been dismembered and scattered—not only by the Romans in their deliberate withholding of respect for her royalty, but also by critics attempting either to epitomize her in her sexuality to damn her, or to efface it by domesticating her as ‘mere’ Roman wife. Uniting all elements of her ‘infinite variety’ (2.2.246) in her climactic act, she metamorphoses her political defeat into a majestic triumph over Caesar, Rome, death, time, and the arts not only of ridiculing comedy, but also of the great genre of tragedy itself ... (116)

Although this reading appears hyperbolic, Cleopatra’s death does achieve all of these things. Perhaps, then, in rising above the earthly concerns of her play and even genre itself, Cleopatra’s act also transcends the limited thinking on ethics that binds Shakespeare’s Roman women within a cruel, no-win scenario.

In this final act of suicide, Cleopatra achieves a public, rhetorical act of agency that successfully emulates—and as implied in the term, supercedes her male peers without degrading or sacrificing the feminine characteristics that define her character in favor of Roman male virtues. True, she does steel herself by claiming, “I have nothing / Of woman in me” (5.2.293), but she does not replace “woman” with “man.” The “marble constant” quality she ascribes to is stereotypically masculine, but it is not beyond argument that she takes on the quality without destroying her body or the feminine aspects of herself that she wishes to retain: indeed, her behavior and the manner of her

death are their own testaments to that assertion. Like Volumnia, whose rhetorical power resides in her maternal role and symbolic representation of Rome role, Cleopatra's rhetorical power resides in Egypt—not the nation, but the identity that extends beyond herself to encompass her rhetoric, her various personae, and both her private and public life.

### **An Ethics of Otherness**

In *Titus Andronicus*, performing the appearance of ethics—or an unquestioned ethics of civic duty—does not make one ethical. Shakespeare's manipulation of who plays the hero and the villain is similar to Tamora's reimagining of the forest glade in that “good” or “bad” relies entirely upon the construction of the rhetorically skilled. When rhetoric has such power to reinvent reality, intention and truth become the foundation of ethics. Tamora speaks with ill intent and no regard for any truth except the truths that she and Aaron create in their quest for chaos and vengeance, and she hides her wickedness behind an appearance of virtue to corrupt the Roman system. In this way, Tamora is unquestionably unethical. In contrast, the Roman women who seek to alter their *ethos* or personae for rhetorical purposes enter a gray area where intentions and means are the best tools to ascertain the legitimacy of their rhetorical ethics. Because they must seemingly change who they are in order to persuade—regardless of how necessary that transformation is to female rhetorical agency and persuasiveness—their rhetorical ethics fall under doubt: in other words, when the rhetorical performance constructs a new *ethos* in place of the one created by a woman's typical, signifying actions, it casts into doubt the sincerity of the speaker. Even Lucrece's ethics remains in question, despite the physical evidence of blood to validate both her victimization and her form of agency. It is

this intersection of performance, *ethos*, ethics, and Renaissance notions of the female sex that bring us to Cleopatra, a performer like no other. The Egyptian queen transcends the limitations on a speaker's *ethos*, male or female, and she achieves rhetorical success without sacrificing her self-image or *ethos* to stereotypical gender exclusivity. This is the key to Cleopatra's place in the ethical discussion: there is no ethical transgression in her political and social agency because she has created an ethics of sincerity and nobility where—according to Roman cultural norms—none could exist.

## CONCLUSION: THE LIMITS OF ROMAN ETHICS FOR FEMALE SPEAKERS

Shakespeare's Rome offers a unique opportunity to explore female rhetoric within the cultural and ethical framework of *romanitas*; within this space, Shakespeare's women perform not only the limits of a restrictive, patriarchal society but the limits of classical rhetoric's standard ethics. Those women who fully adhere to traditional ethics and socio-cultural norms of female behavior rarely achieve more than minimal persuasion, while the women who test their ethical boundaries challenge norms only to reinforce them. An analysis of the Roman women's rhetoric reveals that female speakers could indeed achieve masterful persuasion through a combination of *ethos*, emulation, and shame: these rhetorical tools that are often overlooked or—particularly in the case of emulation—considered features of male speech. Although this analysis hints at greater possibilities for female agency and civic duty, Shakespeare's Roman female speakers fail to create a reformative, lasting agency: instead, they merely re-inscribe the signifiers of stereotypical femininities, and moments of “remarkable behavior” remain “excused” by exceptional circumstances (Buszard 151).

*The Rape of Lucrece*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus* all support the possibility of an ethical female authority that does not require an elision of the female body; however, Shakespeare's Roman world cannot abide the potential of this authority's rhetorical and political influence. Because Rome's virtuous women will not or cannot sacrifice social order for the sake of personal interest or agency, the potential for such an authority cannot be found within Rome's ideological walls. Outside those walls, Tamora and Cleopatra provide other possibilities: Tamora demonstrates the potential and consequences of wholly unethical rhetoric, but Cleopatra

offers an alternative form of female authority defined by an ethics of performance. The Egyptian queen's rhetoric remains unethical by traditional Roman standards, and yet she assimilates the best of Rome's rhetorical performativity to resist a Rome corrupted by its own values. Through Cleopatra, Shakespeare demonstrates the imperfections within male ethical authority and the prospect of a female authority that acknowledges and plays to the various signifiers of femininity rather than seeking to imprison them under the patriarchal chains of domesticity and chastity. Whereas the Roman women offer examples of ethical female authority contemporary to Shakespeare and his depiction of Rome, Cleopatra offers a transcendent—and perhaps ethical—female authority that assimilates the best of Rome into itself.

Although Cleopatra's rhetoric does not offer a wholly satisfactory solution to the problem of ethical but subordinated female authority within Shakespeare's Rome, she does provide an idea of what the transcendent female *ethos* could be. This contrast between the unsatisfying ideal female *ethos* and Cleopatra's transcendent one invites new research that continues to investigate the ethical, rhetorical, and performative frameworks of female speech in other Shakespearean or Renaissance texts. In turn, such studies create new ways of assessing or empathizing with traditionally demonized women within the Shakespearean corpus. Ultimately, it would be beneficial to see how other Renaissance works depict the interaction between female rhetorical agency and ethics. Shakespeare's Rome demonstrates the troubling incompatibility between stereotypes, ideals, and necessities of female agency. Within these conflicts, performance bridges the gap between perfection and reality, and, in doing so, seeks to “find out new heaven, new /

Earth” (Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra* 1.1.18-19), where traditions of restrictive signification and ethics can be rewritten.

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